COMIC FANDOM Quarterly

#4 Q4 2015

$9.95

George Pérez Interview!

Two Decades of Comic Book Movies

Part Four of A Five Part Series

Early George

This month's issue is so packed, we didn't have room for Fanzine Corner, so we moved it up front to the editorial space.

Below are some pages that George posted to his Facebook page recently. These pages were from a story he wrote and drew called The Battalion - when he was still in high school! Enjoy this peek into the formation of a comic legend!

-Robin Dale

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Comic Fandom Quarterly logo designed by *Arlen Schumer*

Coming Soon
CFQ #5 - Matt Wagner interview
CFQ #6 - All Fanzine Issue!
CFQ #7 - Comic Book TV Shows Part 1!

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MANNY MARIS is ...

A longtime collector of books, magazines, limited editions, portfolios, prints, and pre-1973 FANZINES (amateur publications) on or about:

*** Early 20th Century Comic Strips 1895-1945 * Adventure & Hero Pulps 1930-1950 * Golden Age comics 1935-1952 * Convention Programs up until 1980 ***
*** EC comics and artists 1949-1956 (Frazetta, Al Williamson, Wally Wood, Krenkel, Crandall, Severin, et al) * Monster, Fantasy Film, and Warren Magazines 1955-1970 ***
*** Golden Age Comics Fanzines 1952-1970 * Silver Age Comics and MMMS/Marvelmania Club items 1956-1970 ***
*** Golden Age Underground Comix & Artists 1959-1980 (Crumb, Jaxon, Irons, Moscoso, Spain, Shelton, Robt Williams, Griffin, et al) ***
*** Silver & Bronze Age artists 1962-1985 (Kirby, Corben, Steranko, Bodé, Jeff Jones, Wrightson, Kaluta, Barry Smith, Neal Adams, Chaykin, et al) ***

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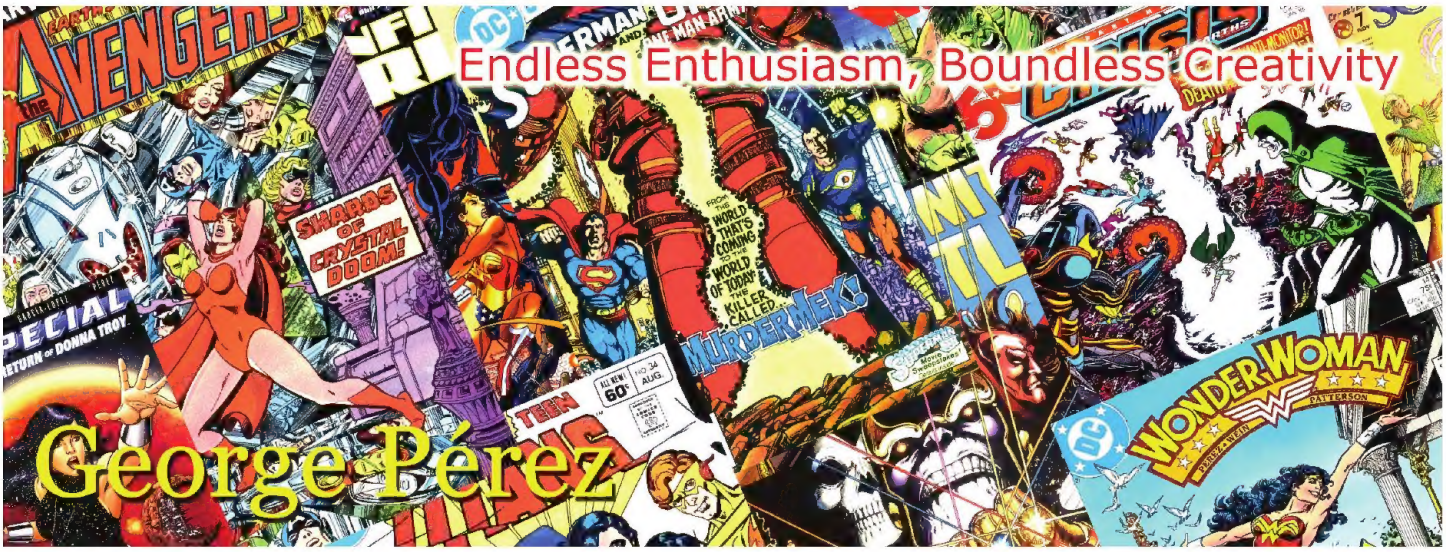
- Brevity [Jeff Jones] 1
- Weirdom [Dennis Cunningham] 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, Best Of, M.A.P.A Special
- The Artist [Steve Fritz] ALL issues
- Warlock [Larry Montgomery] ALL issues
- Amateur Producer's Magazine (or) Gotham Gazette (or) Magnum Opus [Steve Kelez] ALL issues
- Fantastic Films Illustrated (or) Phantasm [John Carpenter] ALL issues
- Web Spinner (or) The Unearthly (or) Spectre (or) For Monsters Only (or) Mutha Load (or) Ray Gun [Mike Appel or John Nyman] ALL issues
- Fantastic Fanzine Newsroom (or) The Guardsmen Of Infinity (or) Bombshell Bulletin [Gary Groth] ALL issues
- Fantastic Fanzine [Gary Groth] ALL issues through #5
- All Dynamic [Alan Light] 1, 2
- Action Hero [Wayne & Sherman Howard] ALL issues
- Comic Crusader [Marty Greim] 1
- Odd [Dave Herring] ALL issues
- Epic [Frank Miller] ALL issues
- G.A.S. Lite [Tony Isabella or Peter Kuper] ALL issues
- The Foob (or) Stories Of Suspense (or) Super-Adventures (or) What Th..? [Marv Wolfman] ALL issues
- Spectacle [?; '68] 1
- Cosmos (or) CosmosStilletto (or) Faun (or) Mantis (or) Tinderbox [Gene Klein] ALL issues
- Phoenix [Lamar Blaylock] ALL issues
- Proteus [Dave Fryxell] ALL issues
- 13 Floors Elevator [?] 10
- Fan Informer [Theakston, Buckler, et al] ALL issues
- Anything Goes [?; '68] 1
- OSFIC [Ontario Sci-Fi Club] 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21
- EChhhh! [Ken Winteri] ALL issues
- Blase [Art Spiegelman] ALL issues
- Enclave (or) Smudge [Joe Pilati] ALL issues
- Jack High (or) Cavil [Phil Roberts] ALL issues
- Mindfucke [Bhob Stewart] All issues
- Klepto [Denis Kitchen] ALL issues
- Squire [Skip Williamson] ALL issues
- Nope [Jay Kinney] ALL issues
- Fanfare [Marty Pahls] ALL issues
- Good Lord (or) Spoof [Doug Brown] ALL issues
- HK Reader (or) HK Digest (or) Shag [Sig Case] ALL issues
- Nugada (or) This [Don Elgeti] ALL issues
- Frantic [Joel Moser] ALL issues
- Movieland Monsters (or) Nightmare [Jerry Weist] ALL Issues
- Photon [Mark Frank] ALL issues through #18 (MUST have pasted-in photos - or still inserts for #s 13 and up)
- Terror [Mel Sobel] ALL issues
- Gore Creatures [Gary Svehla] ALL Issues through #10
- Garden Ghouls Gazette [Kell or Collins] ALL issues through #16
- Fantasy Fandom Crossroads (or) Horror Screen World (or) Character Get Together [Charles 'Chuck' Rogers] ALL issues
- Comic Feature (or) Power Comics (or) Super Spy (or) Blackjack [Larry Walczak] ALL issues



Robin Dale: We here with George Pérez, George - thank you for being with us today.

George Pérez: Thank you!

RD: I want to go ahead and take you through your career and celebrate your vast achievement. You've accomplished quite a bit. You're still a fan favorite after all these years. Some people also may suffer a little bit of quality loss in their work as they get older or whatever, you seem to have maintained a pretty high level of quality output and fan favoritism.

GP: Well I mean - to disagree with the first part about always being popular - I went through my down period as well, usually because of picking the wrong projects, during the years where the speculation boom made anything we touched supposedly you know profitable, and I was starting to choose projects for the money and realize that no amount of money would make me enjoy the work more. So I was picking projects for all the wrong reasons. So there was a time after the *Titans*, after my big successful era in the 80s, that my career became more of a - it was not exactly a quality drop, it's just that I wasn't completing my projects. I wasn't finishing things I was beginning. I was becoming what I call the Orson Welles of comics - they couldn't deny Orson Wells' genius, but they couldn't trust him to get a job done. So for a while I was actually actively blackballed because of certain series - which obviously we'll talk about - that just didn't get completed due to my own lack of professionalism, as they saw it. So I had to rebuild my career. So I ended up having a rebirth, a comeback of sorts, and now I'm old enough to of course appreciate that. I'm grateful that I do have a large fan following here after 32 years in the industry.

George in 2006

RD: That is very impressive. I know I have spent a lot of time talking to other fans and other professionals, and you're a professionals professional. I mean there's numerous artists that are all - every time I mention George Pérez's name it's all "Oh George Pérez, I love his stuff." I've really never heard anybody say "George Pérez, he just sucks!" I'm sure there are detractors, but -

GP: Of course anyone who reads the internet will find that!

RD: True, but it's surprising there's not as many out there for you as there are for some other people, and even in that vein where everybody just throws everything out that's on the top of their head and their ego, you know.

GP: Well the thing about it - in fact when you brought up the word ego - is the fact that they can tell I still genuinely enjoy doing what I do. I love drawing comics, and I try to at conventions show that, both in the work I do and the enthusiasm and being personable to the fans who basically have provided me with a career that has lasted as long as it has.

Thankfully I've got a strong moral core that I got from my parents particularly my mom where you know I don't believe in being obnoxious or thinking that because I've been a celebrity of any measure that allows me the right to be rude or to be arrogant or superior to anybody. I know what it's like you know to have to struggle and I know that I am making a very good living drawing comic books. I'm not digging ditches, I'm not doing a 9 to 5 job clawing my way to the top, I'm doing exactly what I love to do and get paid quite handsomely.

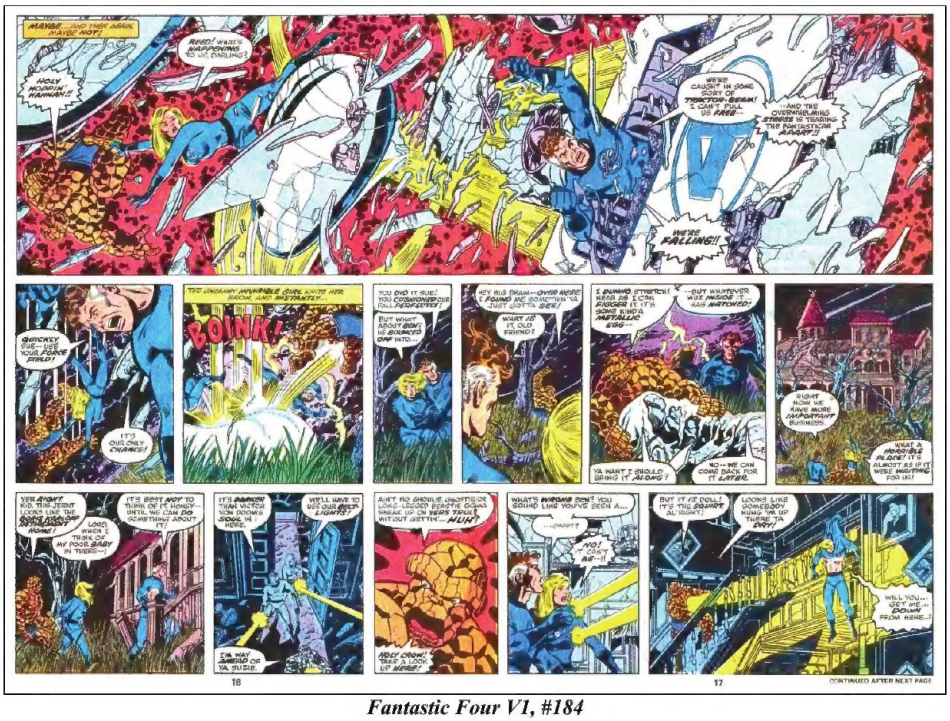
RD: And hope nobody finds out!

GP: Oh yeah exactly! "This is not really work!" I try to give them bang for their buck. When people see my artwork they know that I'm not trying to be lazy about it.

RD: I don't think anyone would ever accuse you of that!

GP: I'm still my own harshest critic, I mean I do worry about the fact that when people say "Why don't you simplify your work?" I say: A) Maybe they think it's too cluttered or B) it would make me be more productive. But I've created this Frankenstein, my style, and the second I start taking the short cuts the fans will see it and they will interpret that as a loss of some of your enthusiasm.

Now one of the things I've always strived for is that professional, that fan that thinks the work is insane, because it is something I'm passionate about, and passion is a form of insanity, it's not meant on logic it's meant on gut feeling right, something that gives you great pleasure, and I like putting that extra bit of work in there. I'm always of the feeling that if the fan cannot see that I'm enthusiastic *with* my work, they have no reason to be enthusiastic *about* my work. So I gotta show the love for my work.


MAYBE...SHE'D THINK AGAIN, MAYBE NOT!
REED! WHAT'S HAPPENING TO US? EVOLVING?
HOLY MORBIUS! I'M HUMAN!
WE'RE FALLING!!
BOINK!
QUICKLY, SUE--USE YOUR FORCE FIELD!
IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!
WHAT IS IT, OLD FRIEND?
I'M NOT SHOULD'A DO YA, SUE!
AIN'T NO SHOULDA, UNLESS I'M LONG-LEGGED BEATNIK DOING SNEAK UP ON HERB TARLS WITHOUT GETTIN'--AUUH!
ANDY CROW! THAT'S YOU, YA WEREW--
WILL YOU... GET ME DOWN FROM HERE...!
18
17
CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

Fantastic Four V1, #184

RD: And it rubs off, it's infectious.

GP: Exactly! And we're talking about a field that there's so many people who may be picking up your work for the very first time. They gotta feel that fire that on that first read. The old adage of only having that one chance to make that first impression, so you have to grab them. I sometimes feel that artists who say the fans have passed them by have maybe allowed themselves to become a little lazy about it. We have to work at it, it's a young profession. I mean I'm 52 two years old, and I'm figuring that I'm like the old master gun fighter who always has to be wary of this young buck who's going to try to prove themselves faster than me. So I always had to keep my talent honed. I always have to be aware that there is somebody that I may feel is better than I am and they gotta keep me on my edge, and I appreciate that. I look at some of the young artists there, and even artists whose style I may not particularly like, I see something there, I think "Ooh, I gotta pick up a little bit of this."

RD: So even at this stage you're learning.

GP: Oh yes! I mean I hope I never stop learning. I don't want to be complacent. A story when I did the *Teen Titans* series, when I left the series I wanted to make sure that people understood that it was never because any creative differences - Marv Wolfman was and is a dear friend of mine, I love working with him, he's the gold standard by which I measure all collaborative efforts. But the book was so successful I was able to get away with doing less than my best work and the book will still sell, and that's a dangerous position to be in.

So I said I have to leave this in order to do a series where I have to work harder to get my success, to prove that it will sell because of effort, not because of momentum, as in that case. So of course the next series was *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which was a series that probably would have sold well whether I drew it or not, but I had to put my extra effort in there, and in this case -

RD: And did you ever!

GP: And part of that extra effort was because of the artist who replaced me on Titans for a few issues: Jose Garcia Lopez. I absolutely adore his work, but when I saw his work on that issue I said "I can be replaced, even on a series I created!" So I had to work even harder on *Crisis on Infinite Earths* than after *Crisis* where pretty much I had done everything I could have done with the DC Universe and choosing my next project I ended up choosing the series that no one would have expected me to want to do, which was *Wonder Woman*. It was a series that few people ever dreamed would be successful and that was a challenge. That's the challenge I want, I want a book that no one would ever expect a top-draw our artist, an a-lister to take on. It was a book that usually was assigned, not a book that someone usually volunteers for.

For the same reason I did *The Avengers* back in the 70s, since there were no royalties at the time, it was a book that I wanted to do. Few artists wanted to draw *The Avengers* it was again an assigned book because it was hard work: you're doing multiple characters and getting paid the same page rate.

RD: Which ironically, that is something you enjoy doing a lot.

GP: I came in wanting to do that. When I started my career, in one month - of course I was young and I was working as fast

as I could because I wanted to produce as much comic as I could, even though my abilities could quite match my enthusiasm yet - but I was drawing the *Sons of the Tiger* back up series in *Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu*, *The Avengers*, *The Inhumans* and *The Fantastic Four* at the same time. I think about that, it's like "Oh my God!" You know, what young enthusiasm and energy I had! But again they were all team books.

Fantastic Four I benefited from the glorious inking of Joe Sinnott who made me look a lot better. *Avengers* - even though I would eventually develop a style that will become recognizable - it was a lot more raw, a lot more unrefined than the *Fantastic Four*, and again that's because I had a much stronger inker.

RD: Well we're talking what, '78 here?

GP: We're talking '74, '75.

RD: So that's right at the beginning of your career.

GP: Exactly. I did a series called *Sons of the Tiger* which was a back up to a magazine called *Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu*, and was doing *The Man Wolf* with a writer named David Kraft, and it was his first professional writing job. One of the great advantages of doing those, both with brand new writers, and series that nobody wanted anyway, so we were left alone. We were allowed to be a little more creative. Bill (Mantlo) made *The Sons of the Tiger* the lead feature! It was a series that no one thought would ever amount to anything and became the lead feature of *Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu*. And even though *Man Wolf* was cancelled after 5 issues, reaction to it was very positive. I mean they were phasing out the horror line and they were cutting down on titles, but the fact that I developed a record of upward and forward momentum on series that nobody cared about, and was quite willing to -

Sons of the Tiger

RD: And bringing something to it nobody expected.

GP: Yes and also the fact that they knew I wanted to do the books that no one else wanted, the team books, and had the juvenile chutzpah to say "I could do a great job." And of course I look at my work now and realize how many people helped. I mean *Fantastic Four* helped because of Joe Sinnott who was the constant, whether inking Kirby, then Romita, then Buscema, and he made me look a lot better than I was. Even though I became quite well known for *The Avengers*, *The Fantastic Four* I think was my more polished work of that era. *The Avengers*, there was a certain electricity about *The Avengers*, something that I seem to gravitate to. I enjoy the varied characters, I mean I didn't have to draw Captain America in his series, because I got to draw him in *The Avengers*, or Thor, or Iron Man. I learned a certain style of story telling when it came to handling big fight scenes with multiple characters.

RD: Yes, something you're very well known for.

GP: And I was influenced heavily by cinema, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, particularly people like John Ford who was incredibly good at action, of remembering where everybody is in the course of a fight scene.

RD: You're drawing it and you're doing multiple angles and different takes as things move through the scene, you've got to keep it straight so it's consistent from panel to panel, page to page, with such a big fight, right?

GP: Oh yes in fact it took a while, I think Steve Englehart was writing *The Avengers* at the time, tended to write each piece of the action pretty much from beginning to end. So I was throwing him this curve by starting an action, and then jumping to another action, then coming back to the action, which obviously has had a little time to go a little further. I guess I would compare that to the movie director George Stevens, who was known for multiple cuts. If you watch the gun fight and bar room brawl-fight sequence in Shane, you see how many times he cuts into a scene. Of course now that's become de rigueur. Certain movies don't have takes that last more than two seconds. At the time it was something that was a little unusual. Part of that was because I was handling a large cast of characters, I needed to make sure that I didn't lose track of any lead characters. I didn't believe that any character becomes wallpaper, they have to stay 'in the scene' to use an actors phrase.

RD: And you know you want to give them a little spotlight so that if they have a line of dialogue or whatever you've got all the character bits flowing through those scenes as well.

GP: Right and also kind of directed the writer, because since we were working from plots and the dialogue was not actually written down, they might be inclined to put a bit of dialogue that they had not planned to do. I just thought a lot of these characters, they have to say something. Which I'm sure it was pretty much he way Stan [Lee] and Jack [Kirby] worked because you know Jack would throw in that curveball. You

know, like the Silver Surfer, and now Stan has to work that character into the story. One of the things that Jack did, which I was horribly - even to this day notorious - for doing is not putting liner notes, I tended to put very few liner notes. In doing that it also strengthened my skills as a storyteller. The closer the writer was to what my intent was, the more it proved that I told the story visually. He was able to interpret enough just from the art, and a lot of the early editors, even those who were very, very critical about my art work per se, like Marv Wolfman was the editor of the black and white *Sons of the Tigers* series, he saw the fact that I was really green when it came to the actual drawing, but I was a natural when it came to telling a story visually. He said "That's worth nurturing." So they gave me more chances than I probably would have gotten if I wasn't a natural storyteller.

RD: Well that's good, that's one of the hallmarks of your artistic style, is you have dynamic layouts, you have your way of laying out a page, laying out a sequence, fights especially, even character bits. You go back to the *Titans* issue #38, with "Who Is Donna Troy?" I mean, there were no fights in that. You had this nice story that had to be told, you know - obviously there's dialogue in there to tell you what's going on - but you have a lot of opportunity in there tell things visually from a completely different dynamic than what would have been in the normal book.

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Justice League of America #200

GP: My favorite Titan stories have been the characters driven ones, because it takes a lot more care and understanding of characterization to make a quiet story dynamic. You can say as much with a whisper as a scream if you plan it correctly. So my favorite stories ended up being like "*A Day in the Life*" story in issue #8. Which also happened to be the issue when I met my wife now 25 years. So it has an even greater emotional meaning for me. Also the issue you mentioned, issue #38, and the wedding issue #50. I love those because fight scenes, a punch is a punch, I mean you can make it dynamic, but a punch by it's very definition is dynamic. So to make a quiet scene dynamic demanded that I be creative with not only the flow of the story, but the design of the page.

It's also much more dependent on knowledge of facial expressions, subtle body language, and characters acting like individuals as opposed to just xerox copies of people just wearing different costumes and different hairdos for basically the same person. I had to make sure that they were individuals, and that also meant understanding them. One of the great things about the Titans in particular since they were co-created by Marv Wolfman and me, we understood them as individuals. If I drew Starfire flying, she does not fly the same way Wonder Girl would fly. She does not react to a situation the same way, same thing with Cyborg. I love being able to do that in a quiet situation where a sideward glance means so much that a person in the background, without any desire on my part from Marv to put any any dialogue back, no the person is reacting. But he doesn't have to say that because by that twisted turn of the head, by that direction of the eye, by that posture in the shoulder, we know what the person is thinking because we know the character now.

RD: Yes and I know you've done it and numerous people have done it, that type of scene where you just have a simple panel of a profile, someone looking down or bowing their head, or you know maybe it's defeat, maybe it's sadness, but those types of things can convey so much with just a fairly simple drawing of what's happening in that story and in that moment with that character.

GP: Yeah and again it's such a wonderful challenge which is why I enjoy the quiet scenes, because it is what grounds the characters. I mean, yes they're superheroes, but there has to be something that makes them super and that's comparison to normality. I use the analogy that for every Superman there's a Clark Kent. You have to be able to make both of them convincing.

RD: That must have been very gratifying for you in those particular stories that you've mentioned, and even in the body of *Titans* work for those reasons, that people responded to that. You put that in there intentionally, you said "We're going to do this story a little different in pacing and style" and then people really keyed into that and they were like "Oh this is wonderful stuff, we haven't seen someone do this before or do it this well." That must have been very gratifying to know that all that work that you put into saying let's try something different paid off and people responded to it.

GP: And unusually, sometimes the most gratifying praise is

the one that the most aggravating or the most ego bruising, because they start commenting on the characters, "Oh these characters are great I love how the story is going" and they don't make the comment about the artwork. They [don't] say "Oh but it was beautifully drawn, look how dynamic it looks, look at the shading" because they're so drawn to the story. It took a while for me to get used to that, of not having my ego stroked by a person not mentioning me. When I realized that they're talking about the characters that became, as Mark Wolfman has often said, that we paid attention to the story, first and foremost it's the story. It's not that Marv was suddenly clever with a turn of phrase, or that I come up with an angle that made it even more dynamic. No, it kept them in the story.

RD: That's great, and that's something that if you're not careful like you say, you don't get the ego stroke of your art was great, they respond to the story, you're at least certainly at this point mature enough to realize that they are responding to the artwork, and the story, so they're responding to you as an artist, he as a writer combined, in that sense that they're not focusing on "Oh your artwork is dynamic and great" they're saying "I love the story."

Justice League of America #184

GP: And sometimes you get that gratification by doing the covers, because obviously the cover is a dynamic image and that is going to be dependent solely on how good you draw it and how dynamically you draw, so that's my one little ego gratification. But also unlike a good action scene, unlike any quiet or loud scene, a cover is meant to stop you, stop the action. One of the biggest problems of course in doing a comic book is, and particularly in this day and age of creators as celebrities of sorts, is the temptation to showboat, the temptation to do the page that we know we will sell later on in the retail market. So we end up stopping the action for the pinup, and we have to be careful there.

RD: It's a dangerous slope because in some ways you need that, especially for covers, and while there's money involved in all of this, it's an artistic endeavor too. As an artist especially I'm sure you're very aware of keeping that quality up because you want people to like it, respond to it, enjoy it, not just because you get a fatter paycheck. I think people appreciate that about you, they know that about you.

GP: Well and the fact that I like the collaborative process. I mean when I worked on one of them, and when I worked on my own [stories] so I get used to sharing the credit - and sharing the blame! - when doing a story. And the fact that as much as you appreciate the praise, one person's praise for certain thing may color how you then approach it, because then you're too aware of "Oh, I do these type of shots well, people like these type of shots" and I'll be doing these type of shots all the time in order to cater or pander to that particular artist. Just concentrate on telling the story.

I think one of the things that people of my generation, and those who have followed now, is that we think cinematically because we were raised in a cinematic culture, with movies and television both. I admired those artists that came before us, who most of them when they started in 1930s, I mean there were silent films and the like, but I don't know if they were quite as cinematically influenced because there wasn't a gigantic body of cinematic work for them to be influenced by. It's like thinking in color if you're blind type of feel. I am a product of my time, so when I think of a scene, I'm thinking of where is the camera going to be, the idea that I'm even conceptualizing it as a camera angle is something of course because of the generation I've been in. When I do a quiet scene, do I want to make it seem cinematic or soap opera? Television from the years that I -

RD: So you're just drawing from everything!

GP: Yes exactly, and in those days soap operas, the video cameras were basically bolted to the floor rolling on wheels, you couldn't be free. So did you want to do a scene where you have talking heads, or do you want to do a scene like in the cinema where the camera is free? So you start weighing what you can do, where you can you do the wide vistas, and then where can you get in and close in on the iris of the eye? That type of thing.

From Marvel to DC

RD: You talked a little bit about *Titans* and your earlier work in *Avengers*. How did you make the move from Marvel to DC?

GP: Well that was a real, I guess an uproar at the time, there was a bunch of defections from longtime Marvel artists when editorial decisions at Marvel made it a little harder for them. I think that the abolition of the writer/editor concept at Marvel was affecting a lot of long term writers, who themselves had been editors. Roy [Thomas], Marv [Wolfman], Len Wein - they all were editors at one point there, editors-in-chief in fact, and while it never affected me and I was never made to feel

unwelcome - in fact I was working on the Avengers at the time with Jim Shooter for a while who was the editor-in-chief at marvel - it wasn't exactly for me a defection as opposed to Marv Wolfman who came up to me, who had already gone over to DC and was proposing a New Teen Titans series revival. I had not worked for DC at the time at all, I just wanted to be able to play another sandbox, to be able to work with characters I've grown up with. I'd love to draw Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, all these characters. That was the same feeling I had when I took over the Avengers.

So I decided that I wanted to do the *JLA*. I didn't really care for the Teen Titans, at least not the second version. I mean I love the original Bob Haney/Nick Cady version, but they had an interim series that I didn't care for at all. So I just thought I'll do it as a favor to Marv as long as they let me do at least an issue or two of *JLA* to fill in for Dick Dillin when he goes on vacation. And of course the sheer irony was that I think almost two weeks after I said that Dick Dillin died, and I ended up getting the JLA, since again, there were no royalties! So it's like "George is willing to take it? Let's give it to him!"

BONG!
HUH?
WHAT IN BLAZES? OHHH.
UHHH, MISTER...
YEAH? WHAT DO YOU WANT, KID?
MY BALL...
...please...?
YER BALL?
YER BALL?
AGAIN HE LAUGHS, A DEEP PLEASANT LAUGH.
SURE, KID...
HIT ONE TO RIGHT FIELD FOR ME, HUH?
M-MISTER, YOUR HAND...!
NUTS! HE'S GONNA SCREAM. MUST THINK I'M SOME KIND'A MONSTER!
WOW! IT'S REAL NEAT. I WISH THEY GAVE ME ONE LIKE THAT.
BUT...
I MEAN, ALL THEY GAVE ME WAS THIS RAS'LAR ONE.
HUH? I DON'T GET IT.
MY HAND. IT'S A PROS... PROSMETIC ...WELL YOU KNOW...
A PROSTHETIC... AN ARTIFICIAL ARM.
JOHNNY? WHAT'S TAKING YOU SO LONG? AND HAVEN'T I TOLD YOU NOT TO BOTHER-- OHHHH.
IT'S OKAY, MISS SIMMS. HE'S JUST LIKE US. HE'S GOT A PROS... A NEW HAND, TOO.
ONLY HIS IS REAL SHINY AN REAL NEAT.
SOMEONE PINCH ME AN' WAKE ME UP!
The New Teen Titans V1, #8

RD: And you did several issues.

GP: Yes and of course I didn't last all that long. I started the trend, after Mike Sekowsky and Dick Dillin having long uninterrupted runs, of not being able to find a regular artist who will stay on it.

RD: But you kept doing covers for a long time after that.

GP: Oh yeah as a favor to editor Len Wein who was also a friend. I loved drawing the characters but obviously covers wer about all I could handle at that point. At that point I was still drawing *The Avengers*, *The Teen Titans* and the *JLA*. I knew after issue #8 in particular of *Teen Titans* that this was a book that really has a lot of promise. I'm really enjoying, I'm getting a lot of creative sparks there, and of course I just started doing JLA, but I could no longer handle three books. So I ended up giving up the only Marvel title of my list, which was *The Avengers* which led to some people speculating that I also was defecting from Marvel because I had dropped *The Avengers*. I just couldn't handle it.

RD: Real quick with that: Back then, and maybe today, there's obviously a contractual type things with these companies especially Marvel and DC depending on the books and the artists. Were you are under contract with Marvel at that time? Were they ok with you working for both companies?

GP: Oh no they would have preferred I work solely for Marvel but they couldn't stop me. We were totally freelance. So my leaving Marvel was just the fact that I left the only monthly title I was doing because I had already had a long enough run. I just started JLA, the Teen Titans was a new book, I ended up dropping the title that I had done enough of for now. So again just the sheer coincidence that it was the Marvel title. People made the assumption that it was also part of the disenfranchised freelancers, because they weren't satisfied with the status quo at Marvel comics. That was never my intention at all. Certain things that happened at Marvel came later but had nothing to do with that situation at that time.

The New Teen Titans

RD: Give us a little bit of insight into the formation of the Titans. How much had Marvel worked up and brought to you, and how much did you contribute in the early part of that set up.

GP: Well in the early part it was really Marv Wolfman and Len Wein had come up with most of the characters and had pretty much developed the back story, so I was really coming in as a visualizer, so I didn't have as much to do with the characters, only little things that I added in as far as the tweaks, the characters bits, the same way I did on *The Avengers*, the same way I did on *Fantastic Four*. It wouldn't be until about issue #8 that I started treating the characters a little more personally, started adding more bits - at Marv's insistence! - he was all gung-ho about me putting my personal stamp on it. In that issue (#8) there's a scene with Cyborg catching a baseball that was fouled out and actually beaned him on the head by a little boy who had prosthetic hands, and met the teacher of the school for handicapped children. That was a scene that I totally created in there, it wasn't in Marv's plot, he was walking around and then I suggested doing this and Marv loved it. I mean, I can't believe really in hindsight that I could just take an entire scene with Cyborg and create it out of whole cloth, I mean what were we going to do with him otherwise? But Marv said "That was a pure George scene."

That's when I knew these characters were really becoming personal to me. I just asked the question, and Marv and I may have talked about it, the he let me go free on it, about well technically isn't Victor a gigantic example of what prosthetics can do? Can we experiment with that a bit? And that's what led to that scene that I put in there, so I can't believe that I

didn't discuss it with Marv, you know? Like it would be "What a surprise I threw at him?" And Marv is totally egoless as far as he was concerned, that added a great touch to story. Marv and I, when we worked on that book, we always have to be careful, to always be aware of the fact that this is not ego. If I make a change, and Marv sees it for the better, he sees it as a change for the better, not that I made a *change* on the strip. Ditto if he writes something that wasn't exactly what I thought he was going to write based on the action I drew, well that's Marv's contribution, it works for the story.

RD: It's always about focusing on the story. That's nice that you can be egoless enough to not be too protective of your turf in that sense and be able to say "Woah, I'm glad you did something that's really good that I enjoy as well and is better for the story overall" and you know, you come together on that.

GP: I remember when I started writing on my own when I did the *Wonder Woman* series and another professional writer came up to me and made the assumption that now I didn't want to work with other writers, and I said no!

RD: Just solely based on the fact that you were writing *Wonder Woman*?

GP: Because so many artists who, you know, feel like they want to write their own work, and once they start writing their own work that's pretty much it. But the thing about it for me is, in the case of Wonder Woman I actually had a story to tell. It's not like I wanted to be a writer/artist I just had ideas that I wanted to do for Wonder Woman. But the thing about working with other people is that then I get surprised, and I've been many situations that I would be working with a writer and he comes in with a plot, I flip the page and it took me in a totally different direction, and a direction I wasn't counting on. So yes, I like to be surprised, and I like to be challenged. So like they give me a story where I'm cursing second I'm reading it, how do they expect me to draw all this? How are they expecting me to accomplish this visually? Well that's my challenge, that's what I'm getting paid for, and they made me a better artist.

THE MINUTE I CEASE TO TRY, IMMORTUS, IS THE MINUTE I FULFILL YOUR PROPHESY OF MY COMING WEAKNESS!
WE WILL NEVER SEE THAT TIME!
YOU AND THE AVENGERS KEPT THE CELESTIAL MADONNA FROM MY HANDS! IF IT TAKES FOREVER, I SHALL DESTROY YOU FOR IT!
MJOLNIR CAN ABSORB THINE EVIL RAY!
--BRING IT INTO CONCENTRATION--
NAY, VILLAIN! 'TIS THOU WHO SHALL SUFFER DESTRUCTION!
--AND HURL IT BACK UPON THEE!
SZZAM!
THAT ROCKED HIM, THOR! YOU DO HAVE AN EXCEPTIONAL MASTERY OF YOUR BELOVED COMBAT!
BUT, LOOK!
FALLING OR FLEEING! IN EITHER CASE, 'TWILL AVAIL HIM NAUGHT!
AM I CORRECT IMMORTUS?
I DO NOT MAKE PREDICTIONS, GOD'LING!
I BUT FOLLOW A ROAD I HAVE ALREADY TRAVELED!
COME!
THIS TIME WILL BE THE END, OF KANG, SO SWEARS THOR!
HE'S FALLING BACK INTO THE HAZE FROM WHICH HE CAME!
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CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE
The Avengers VI, #141

One of the things that I, even when I was doing my own writing, is that I tried to divorce the writer and the artist. I don't want to just draw or write what George Pérez can draw. I want to be able to write something that challenges George Pérez. Like I would write a scene that is, let's say, on an airplane. I hate drawing airplanes, but it serves the story so I better get my research and draw an airplane. As I've told people the difference between writing and drawing: easy! "CROWD." Five letters on a typewriter or a word processor. Totally different for an artist! "CAR." Three letters. Totally different for an artist.

The Art of George Pérez

RD: So let's talk a little bit about, or have you talk about, your art. Give us a little bit of insight into how you do what you do.

GP: Well one of the things that I usually can tell aspiring artists, which is where this subject mostly comes up, when an artist wants to break into the business, when the show me their art work. Drawing will only get you so far. What's key in approaching a comic book page is understanding how to tell a story visually, within the parameters which is usually a 10 by 15 [inch] area that we're working in divided into panels. If you can direct a silent movie in your head and break them down then into storyboards, that's pretty much what we do in comic books. You're trying to tell a story as visually as possible so that you use, to use again a film analogy, as few title cards as possible. The title cards are left for if it's an important message or insight into the person's mind that has to be put down that you can not do visually. The second, if a writer has to put a caption explaining what's on that panel, you have failed.

And for me it's the most natural thing in the world, maybe because I was raised on television and have a great love for movies, but I've been told by many professionals that even when I started in the industry and I was a really weak artist, they can tell that I was a strong storyteller. I could be trained to become a better artist. I could not be trained to be better, natural storyteller. That's very important. So I have to imagine what scene to emphasize in my head, what scene has the most larger panels, which is the equivalent to more screen time, smaller panels for a quick cut, that type of thing.

RD: And you've been known for being able to take the layout and the storytelling and play with time a little bit in the way you divide up a page. Sometimes you'd do a lot of long, thin vertical panels like in the Man Wolf series and some other things like that

GP: And in those days I was actually doing it more for interesting composition and I was still not as strong in the

subtleties of storytelling. Like I would put a thick border because it looked nice, and then a writer would say "Yes but you just stopped the action" because now you've overemphasized something, and I learned more and more. One of the things editor Marv Wolfman taught me when I was doing the Sons of the Tiger series was, I'm drawing all of these scenes but I have not done the establishing shot. There's no sense of place, where are the characters in relation to the surroundings. I needed to add...*backgrounds*! That bit of advice has obviously been taken to ridiculously high heights!

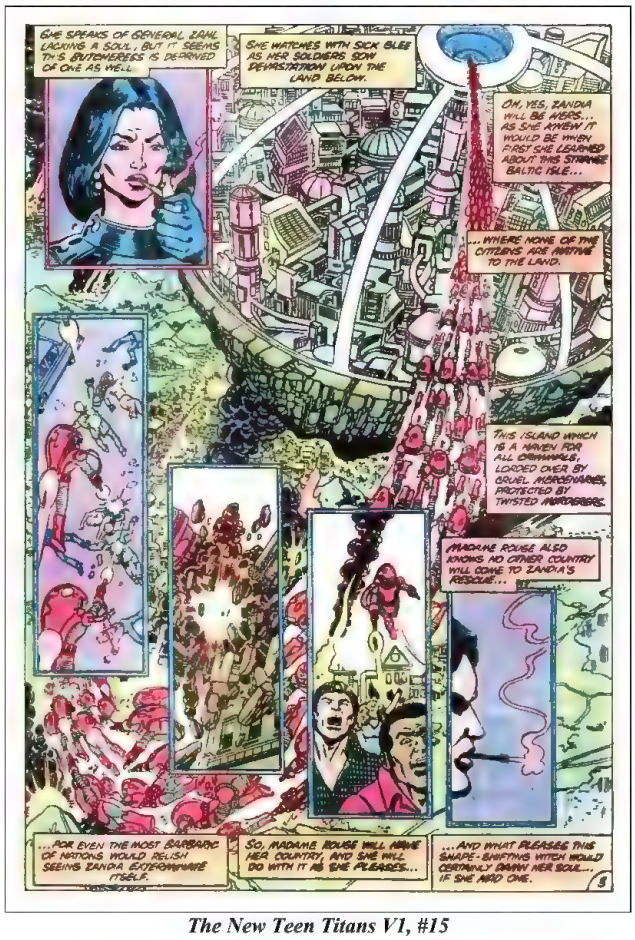
RD: Yeah when you look at those *Sons of the Tiger* stories, or some of the *Man Wolf* stories, there's very plain or no backgrounds in some cases, but you take that stuff to heart it seems.

GP: Well the thing is I was very fortunate. I never had a professional art lesson in my life. I've had an art class, primarily a babysitting class and I got my education from the greatest teachers I could ever imagine: the working artists, the working editors, the art directors. I mean John Romita, Marv Wolfman who used to be an art teacher. All these great people were telling me what I was doing wrong, which was an enormous list, and when I was doing it right, which was a slightly shorter list.

But the things that they said that was worth nurturing was the fact that I knew how to emphasize a story. My characters moved around, there was a natural progression from panel to panel that is what makes things distinctive. There are some artists who can draw rings around me, and there are some artists who draw, by certain standards, poorly but can tell a story like no one's business. They're the ones the writers have the easiest time working with. Sometimes the artists who are most gorgeously illustrative are the toughest ones to write, because we are so blinded we're live by how gorgeous the page looks we realize the story isn't going anywhere or we've emphasized the wrong part of the story. I was learning that as I was going along.

Again using a cinematic analogy, there are those who film in large continuous takes, so they're do the equivalent or doing a lot of large panels where you put a lot word balloons into it. I'm more of a heavy editing type of person, so I cut away a lot, I change the angles a lot within the same scenes. When I first took over *The Avengers*, Steve Englehart did complain a bit because I was working totally different than the artists that preceded me. He would write a fight scene in the plot, and I would do the fight scene but jump around into other fight scenes, and then keep coming back, or move foreground action to background action so I can emphasize different parts of the fight. I figured as a choreographer everything's happening at once, and then Steve definitely started working well with me, because he understood where I was going. I was a new kid, he had never experienced me before.

But even that it was a natural thing for me to do because I am, using an example of the directors again, John Ford: great at the master shot. George Stevens: a man who edits crazy. Look at the fight scene or the bar room gunfight in Shane and see how many cuts there are in those scenes. That's more my kind of approach to it. The thing about it that I had to start learning the difference between detail and clutter. There's a point when if everything is multi panel pages, you're drowning in it, there's no emphasis on anything. So then I had to find where to do the money shots, where do the large shots, and understanding this is going to get the big scene.


SHE SPEAKS OF GENERAL ZAHL LACKING A SOUL, BUT IT SEEMS THIS BROTHERHOOD IS DEPRIVED OF ONE AS WELL...
SHE WATCHES WITH SICK GLEE AS HER SOLDIERS SOW DEVASTATION UPON THE LAND BELOW.
OH, YES, ZANDIA WILL BE MINE... AS SHE KNEW IT WOULD BE WHEN FIRST SHE LEARNED ABOUT THIS STRANGE BALTIC ISLE...
...WHERE NONE OF THE CITIZENS ARE NATIVE TO THE LAND.
THIS ISLAND WHICH IS A HAVEN FOR ALL CRIMINALS, LORDED OVER BY CRUEL MERCENARIES, PROTECTED BY TWISTED MERCENARIES.
MADAME ROUGE ALSO KNOWS NO OTHER COUNTRY WILL COME TO ZANDIA'S RESCUE...
...FOR EVEN THE MOST BARBARIC OF NATIONS WOULD RELISH SEEING ZANDIA EXTERMINATE ITSELF.
SO, MADAME ROUGE WILL HAVE HER COUNTRY, AND SHE WILL DO WITH IT AS SHE PLEASES...
...AND WHAT PLEASES THIS SHAPE-SHIFTING WITCH WOULD CERTAINLY DAMN HER SOUL... IF SHE HAD ONE.

The New Teen Titans V1, #15

When I first started I was originally an assistant to artist Rich Buckler who did layout page and thumbnail, so I did that at the beginning so that you could start figuring out where the money shot is eventually going to be, and will you be able to fit this in the allotted number of pages. Eventually it became natural for me and to this day - it's been decades - I think I did it once in JLA/Avengers because I had to be sure I could fit a particular scene in the limited amount of space I had because there was so much going on. I don't use thumbnails, I go directly to the board. There are other artists who, for different reasons will start on a storyboard, some guys do very complete drawings on the storyboard and then light box it to a full size board.

When I worked for Gil Kane on Jurassic Park I didn't realize that's what he did. I said "How can this man draw so much and I don't see a single erasure on the page?" because he had done all his thinking, all his erasing, in thumbnails and then just transferred them to a board through a light box. But I myself like to go directly into it. Certain little things I learned in the actual ease of working with art. I mean once I started using reference that changed how I approached a page, because then I had to do the establishing panel. Sometimes depending on my references, if it's a limited reference that I needed to use almost line-for-line or close to it because I didn't know what the back of it looked like. Then of course that determined how I was going to set the characters up in that scene for the most part.

But eventually I learned how to look at a photograph in 3D, how to imagine what the reverse side would look like. Again, experience. I would see more sofas, I would see more lamps, so I understand what the back of one would look like or approximate it relatively clearly. I would just learn more and more there, and the one thing, which in working with any writer, is that yes it's nice to be able to do the fancy money shot, but never at the expense of story. The story has to be clear and the story has to be one that you and the writer have come up with together. You don't go in saying "Well, I'm the artist. I don't like what the writer has done. I'm just going to change it willy-nilly." Unless it's something that you know is not going to affect the key elements of the plot. You just found a different way of approaching it. If I were to receive a plot and this doesn't make sense to me, I think it will work better the other way, then I will call the writer and discuss it first before I would do it.

In some cases when I was also writing with other artists, particularly younger artists who are interested more in reselling their pages than they were in telling a story, you would say "OK I need this stuff emphasized." We're having a scene with a lot of a lot of conversation, we need to switch back and forth in the angles so we can keep this scene dramatic. I'd get the artwork back, it's one gigantic panel with one character, which means you have to put all that dialogue into one panel. The worst type of storytelling. For whatever reason that type of stuff became natural to me. Certain things that people take for granted when they're drawing comics, even some of the best storytellers, because I've made the mistake too, remember the visual that you're drawing are missing one key element when you're drawing them: word balloons.

I REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE SAW HIM--HE WASN'T ANYTHIN' LIKE THAT
HE'S GROWN! GOD HAS HE GROWN!
WE COULDN'T STOP HIM WHEN HE WAS OUR SIZE
HOW RE WE GONNA DO IT NOW?
BUT IF HE DON'T SOON - THEN THE EARTH IS DOOMED
T-MAN ALREADY BE I CAN'T PICK UP ANY RADIO WAVES ANY WHERE - NOTHING'S RESPONDING
WE MAY BE THE ONLY ONES LEFT
THEN HE IS TRUMPS IN US KNOWING HE CAN'T STOP HIM YET LETTING US SEE THE DAMAGE HE'S CAUSED
BUT WE CAN'T GIVE UP
MARV WOLFMAN • GEORGE PÉREZ • ROMEO TANGMAL • JOHN COSTANZA • ADRIENNE ROY
CO-CREATORS AND CO-EDITORS WRITER LETTERER COLORIST
THE NEW TEEN TITANS
The New Teen Titans V2, #5

So now they not only have to leave space for them, but figure if this character is talking first and you know who you want talking first, make sure that in the position that the word balloon would be the first one that reads on that panel. So it can get very tricky knowing where the characters are in relation to each other. If you know plan your page correctly it should flow. OK if you have the character walking, OK that means - it's like a relay, now you put the first panel on the other guy. I mean you can get away with it if the writer feels that this other person to talk first, he can just make a long extender pointer to the person who's actually speaking and arrange it that way.

But again you try to avoid making it too cluttered, too messy where you suddenly - the one thing you don't do in word balloons is have the arrows cross each other! So we have to avoid that and make it easy as possible. But sometimes what you end up doing is having the writer rethink some of his dialogue, and if you've done it with a good storytelling, then he will say "that is interesting, I have to adjust myself a bit to make it work." And I have a good instinct for what needs to be changed for the sake of more drama, and what needs to be changed because it would make a different approach to the story and for the latter you always consult the writer.

The Many Faces of George Pérez's Characters

RD: Let's talk a little bit about your faces. You're very well known for your facial artistry and expressions. And also from my personal point of view you're one of the more consistent people, your Wonder Girl for instance will look the same no matter what angle or viewpoint. That's really not something necessarily a lot of people are good at, you get wide variances in facial consistency.

GP: Well you know one of the things that I've always tried to do is I "cast" my characters. In many cases they've already been cast with body types, you know, there are certain ways of drawing Superman. There weren't as many ways to drawing Bruce Wayne. I mean, Batman has so many different faces, I had to develop a Bruce Wayne face. There are certain things that you try to be consistent with the basic shapes, then you start doing a stylization. There is a little too much going off a model now that think has hurt some of the characters where now that we artists have become superstars, we can get away with doing our version of the character even though he looks like no other person's version of that same character. The use of models sheets has long been kind of abandoned. The days when, yes, they redrew the Jack Kirby face on Superman when he went over to DC, that was a little extreme because I always thought his Superman looked close enough, it looked like a Jack Kirby Superman - square jaw, everything, it was still Superman. He just didn't look like Curt Swan Superman or Murphy Anderson Superman. I think that's kind of a little too far.

They did the same thing over at Marvel, John Romita faces appeared on Jim Starlin figures and Neal Adams figures, because they wanted them to look like the character. Now we've kind of gone the other way where you can see three

Spider-Man books and Peter Parker and Mary Jane don't look the same in any of the books. Sometimes they don't look the same within the same book, as you mentioned, some artists are not very good at being able to see their characters in multiple directions, so when they draw them in one position they look one way, they draw them in another position they look another.

My case I try to think of the characters in 3D. It started primary with the *Teen Titans* book, although people credited me even when I was doing *The Avengers,* that they could tell the difference between Hawkeye and Steve Rogers and Clint Barton. It was a little more subtle then because it was just they were extreme types to me, but if I had to do a more subtle thing I thought there was less difference between Steve Rogers and Hank Pym. Because I wasn't good enough then to be able to make faces that distinct, I would do just slight variations, but as I was doing the *Teen Titans* I wanted them to look unique, I wanted there to be a definite difference between Robin and Kid Flash. You will notice that more as I went along in the series. When I first started I was still coming off my days at Marvel, still drawing the characters very blocky, and very much standardized in their appearances, so there wasn't much difference between Kid Flash and Robin.

OH, VIC'S VIC'S YOO-HOO, VICTOR
HEY! RUST-BUCKET-- WHERE YOU HID'NG?
WHAT'RE YOU DOING IN THE SCREENING ROOM?
THAT STUFF'S BORIN' GARBAGE. LOOKIT THIS
WATCHIN X RATED FLICKS?
'MEMBER I SAID THE WITCH'S FACE SEEMED TO CHANGE?
SHUT UP, BALD-HEAD AN GET IN HERE!
ONLY IT'S BEEN CHANGIN ALL ALONG
HERE'S A PIC FROM THE TIME WE MET THE J.L.A.* THAT'S BEFORE SHE MET TRIGON
NOW LOOK THIS IS WHEN WE FIRST MET TERRA *
AFTER THIS PIC WAS TAKEN SHE STARTED WEARIN' HER HOOD FULL-TIME!
SH-SHE LOOKS ALMOST EVIL I NEVER REALIZED SHE'S CHANGED SO MUCH
HOT-SHOT, NONE OF US DID
SEE? HER FACE WAS SOFTER THEN.
HER HAIRLINE'S CHANGIN' HER CHEEKS'RE SUNKEN
*TNTT #4 --G&M
*TNTT #28.--M&G
WHEN YOU'RE WITH SOMEONE EVERY DAY YOU DON'T SEE THE SUBTLE CHANGES
IT CAN'T BE JUST BECAUSE SHE WAS GROWING UP MAN, THAT GIVES ME THE CHILLS!
YEAH IT FREEZES UP MY OIL, TOO
GAR, SOMETH'N' BAD'S COMIN' DOWN. I JUST WISH SHE'D TELL ONE OF US WHAT'S WRONG
The New Teen Titans V2, #1

RD: But you did have a distinctly different style. Obviously for Cyborg, but you had Gar, Changeling -

GP: Yeah exactly a very roundish face. One of the things I think I was trying to do to was, I was still doing archetypes. The reason Gar looked so different is because he was supposed to be younger, so I was doing a younger face, I had a standard younger face. Robin, well, he had an established face, and the bodies were all pretty much alike, even Changeling whose body was supposed to be of a younger boy, looked like a less muscular and as beefy as Robin or as not as beefy as Kid Flash, I mean he's a speedster he really shouldn't be that heavy anyway. And the women all of them, I mean there was a time when Starfire was shorter than Robin at the beginning then I started developing ideas for body types. I wanted to work on distinctive faces that would be consistent throughout the series, and things changed. Raven went through a drastic change that was so drastic we even wrote it into a story as to why she's changing that way.

RD: And let me touch on that just for one moment, which was this brilliant thing. I remember reading that and not even realizing that. It was in the Baxter Teen Titans series where you brought that out where you said, "Here's Raven, she's changed over time" and showed clips from different issues, which were redrawn, but they're in the issues, those changes are there if you track back 6 months or a year, you can see that change over the time in her visage.

GP: Yes, because her face was such a drastic change and of course the payoff was the fact that now she had become demonic by then end of that particular issue. It was like one of those rare times where I can go back and explain an "I meant to do that" scenario. But all it was an evolvement of my style but I was able to make it work in like that. Then you can look at those issues and say "Oh he deliberately drew her this." And ironically I wasn't the first one to draw Raven's face. Raven's face was always in a cowl. Curt Swan filled in on my in for me in issue #5 and he did not know that she was supposed to be kept mysterious and revealed her without the hood. So then I had to follow suit, so basically I am now drawing Curt Swan's version of Raven because the character had not been established at that point. So Curt Swan drew Raven's face first.

When I started to do body types, and also I was always interested in acting I did theater when I was in school. I would eventually a lot of community theater, I've acted, I've directed, and body language and keeping people in the scene in became very important, that people did not just stand dead when they had no lines they had to stay alive in the scene, and they had to stay in character in the scenes. So that is when I started paying attention, like "this is how Starfire would stand." I started making Starfire taller to differentiate her from Wonder Girl. Wonder Girl had at the we would consider the Marie Osmond face, the all-American girl face. Kori I used my first wife and a porno star as a pastiche of what she it ended up being.

RD: And even following onto that a little further you even differentiated them, well all the characters actually, but particularly the women all had three different body types.

GP: Exactly. Raven had the distinction not only that her face changed, she was one of the few women in comics who's bust got smaller. So the leg men loved her. Obviously the character was not meant to be an action character, she had a dress that was slit up to her hip and was very distinctive. She wore

pumps! But I started changing her and so she became a much more slim, and since here face was reflecting that it worked naturally for her character. Starfire, with the exception of her height, changed the least. In fact I started rounding her eyes even more. She changed the least because she was supposed to be the Marilyn Monroe-esque type of character, she was the sex symbol of the series.

RD: And again, a decade or so before that would become -

GP: Right, where everyone was built like that. And one thing that interesting by creating the different body types, I mean yes Kori was the sex symbol, you found that with three distinct women they had three distinct followings. Those who thought that Raven was the sexiest of the characters, or Starfire or that Donny Troy/Wonder Girl was the sexist.

Kori because of the superficiality of the attractiveness. They liked her because yes, she is the bombshell. Wonder Girl is the girl next door you want to marry, you know the old Mary Jane Watson routine, the next door neighbor who happens to be gorgeous. And Raven because of the mystery or almost the Goth appeal, and the fact that because of her appeal and her outsider nature not only did she appeal to certain type of guys, she appealed to even gay men, who liked her the same way gay men follow Judy Garland and the tragic figures who are bigger than life who had a great sense but seemed to be tortured.

There was one man who wrote to me, he loved Raven it was his favorite character, she was his favorite character, he would get Raven sketches. I wasn't until years later I found out he was gay. That character spoke to him. I was never above putting a little beefcake in with my cheesecake. I emphasize Dick Grayson quite a bit, he became a real sexually appealing character to a lot of female readers at the time. So the girls got their play, so did the guys.

RD: And eventually you dealt with some themes like that when Dick and Kori were living together having much more of an intimate relationship than you usually would have been presented in comics.

GP: And when I actually drew the scene where Dick Grayson and Kori were actually showed in bed together in the Baxter series, in fact in the first issue of the Baxter series, a lot of people made a big deal of it saying "Oh my God you caused a real scandal!" I actually didn't. A) Marv and I were getting a lot of autonomy on the series and B) it made sense.

RD: Also the Baxter series did have a little more maturity to it, and not just maturity like had a more graphic-ness, but maturity in the characters and everything else. When that scene came up, I remember reading that and not being too surprised by it. I was kind of like "Oh, that makes sense."

GP: What's interesting also was that it had a dual edge to it, because the reason I put that scene in there I knew there was going to be an upcoming storyline that would deal with the relationship between Dick and Kori, and I said with the decision that Dick is going to have to make we have to show that, yes, he is committed to this woman. So I was very bothered by the following storylines after I had left the series that dealt with Kori's wedding. One of the rare times I disagreed with Marv but I was off the book. If I had been on the book it would have gone a different direction, I would have insisted on certain things where we would have at least had a good argument about it, a creative argument.

WOOOOOOOOO
X'HAL! WHAT WAS THAT?
IT ALMOST DIDN'T SOUND HUMAN. C'MON I'LL BUZZ THE OTHERS
KORY--LOOK! IT'S A STORM.. BUT A FEW MOMENTS AGO
IT WAS CLEAR WHAT IS T'DICK? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
I THINK I KNOW BUT LET'S PRAY I'M WRONG.
YOU HEARD IT TOO?
I WAS DREAMIN' BOUT WE AN JENN FER BEARS, WHEN
SMOKE'S COMIN FROM RAVEN'S ROOM SO I WUZ RIGHT - SOMETH'N SCREWY IS GOIN ON.
T-S JOEY? BUT WHERE'S RAVEN?
DICK! GET OVER HERE! LOOK AT HIS EYES!
JOE, TRY TO CALM DOWN. WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE'S RAVEN? WHAT WAS THAT SCREAM?
THEY'RE CRAZY
OH, LORD VIC. HE'S SIGNING TOO FAST FOR ME. CAN YOU READ IT?
JOE! YOU OKAY? HEY TAKE IT EASY IT'S ME!
TEAM. HE KEEPS SAYING "FATHER!"
OKAY. HE'S SLOWIN' DOWN. TELL IN US THE STORY NOW

The New Teen Titans V2, #1

The reasons he was giving me I said no, it didn't make sense to me. You know the fact that will do that to Dick, I said no! And that Dick would let this happen. This is a man who has now committed himself to her. No he would fight for her, he would go and take care of her. But she's a creature of duty, she's doing it for the sake of her race. No, this is a woman who escaped captivity, she was enslaved! Because that would save her race yet she still have enough personal pride and personal desire for freedom to escape that, even though what she's doing is breaking that treaty, no she would not do it for those reasons. So that would have changed totally had I still stayed on the Titans, but of course, I didn't stay on the Titans so what right have I to make those changes.

RD: Well, you still had that attachment to those characters.

GP: Well I think that makes you also understand why sometimes fans can get very vocal about certain changes. If it doesn't make sense to the fans, you know, they come down like the Hammer of God.

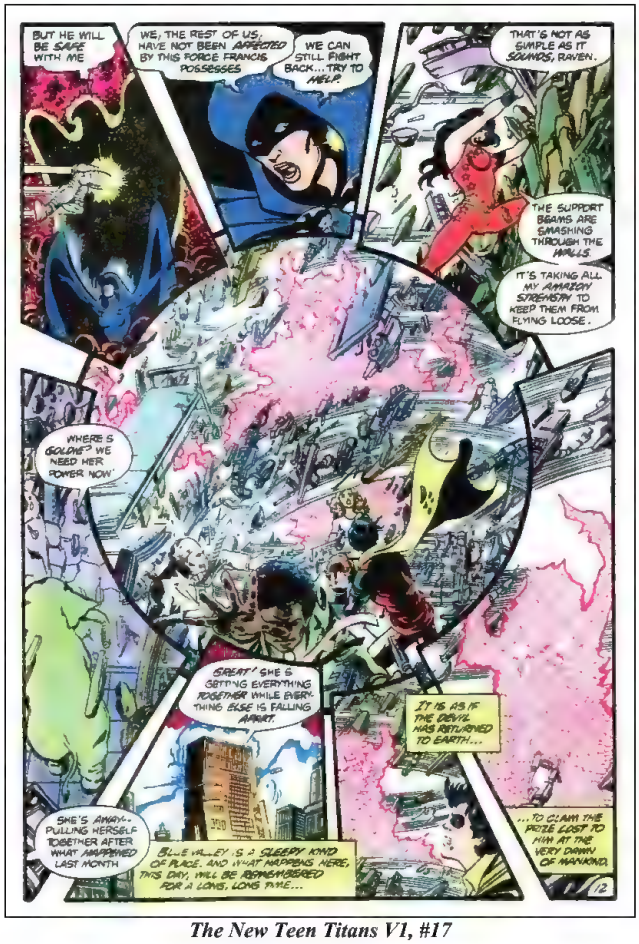
The George Pérez Look

RD: There's the George Pérez "look." How did that develop?

Because obviously it's changed quite a bit from Sons of the Tiger, to Avengers and then Titans, where you really solidified your style, but there's just that certain look. Was it just a development or did you really kind of consciously say "Look I want to try to do things a certain way and then push my art into a certain area?"

GP: Well the bulk of it, it was a development, an evolution of my style. Because quite frankly when people start saying "The George Pérez style" or anybody's style, the last person that usually sees that is themselves, because we see the influences that have brought on our style, we don't see it as our own, we see it as the culmination of all the people who inspired us, who've influenced us, and I didn't see the George Pérez style. I didn't notice it until I started seeing other people then doing my style or doing stuff that was inspired by my work. The same way I would see a little Gil Kane in a certain panel, the same way I would see a little Neal Adams or John Buscema.

When people like Phil Jimenez came along I started saying "Yes, I recognize that!" because now I recognize it as something I would have thought of as well. Then I started seeing what they meant by a George Pérez style, but inwardly there was never an attempt to create a George Pérez style, just to draw comics the way I thought was gonna look within the limits of my own ability and the influences of everyone who's work I ever saw.


BUT HE WILL BE SAFE WITH ME
WE, THE REST OF US, HAVE NOT BEEN AFFECTED BY THIS FORCE FRANCIS POSSESSES
WE CAN STILL FIGHT BACK... TRY TO HELP
THAT'S NOT AS SIMPLE AS IT SOUNDS, RAVEN.
THE SUPPORT BEAMS ARE SMASHING THROUGH THE WALLS
IT'S TAKING ALL MY AMAZON STRENGTH TO KEEP THEM FROM FLYING LOOSE.
WHERE IS SOLOMAR? WE NEED HER POWER NOW
GREAT! SHE IS GETTING EVERYTHING TOGETHER WHILE EVERYTHING ELSE IS FALLING APART.
IT IS AS IF THE DEVIL HAS RETURNED TO EARTH...
SHE'S AWAY... PULLING HERSELF TOGETHER AFTER WHAT HAPPENED LAST MONTH
BLUE VALLEY IS A SLEEPY KIND OF PLACE. AND WHAT HAPPENS HERE, THIS DAY, WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR A LONG, LONG TIME...
...TO CLAIM THE PRIZE LOST TO HIM AT THE VERY DAWN OF MANKIND.
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The New Teen Titans V1, #17

RD: Let's go into that a little bit then. Who were some of your influences?

GP: My first one was Curt Swan, the Superman artist, and his style was, and again I didn't crystalize this in my mind until I became more educated in art, but he was the Norman Rockwell of comic books. Everything having very much of a very pastoral setting, a very calm influence, even when the action scenes came in. Curt was not the most dynamic of all artists but he was consistent and there was a certain nobility there. Then of course came the man who just exploded to me, because I had never seen him before, was Jack Kirby. This man's work, his characters were not particularly attractive, but God they had power! They didn't just stand, they had weight when they stood. There was energy flowing even in a stationary position. Then as others came in: John Buscema who was like a combination of Curt Swan filtered through Jack Kirby. Gil Kane who added ballet-like elegance. His Green Lantern was gorgeous. Carmine Infantino who added a bit of angular expressionism to his background then into his figures which were sometimes softened up by the inkers like Sid Greene and Murphy Anderson.

All these great artists, then the one who became the biggest revelation of all to me at that time was Neal Adams when he came in. Suddenly an ultra-realistic approach to handling characters which of course Neal had filtered through working with Stan Kaye and all the other people who influenced him. But I saw Neal Adams and suddenly it was a revelation. Suddenly comics were so incredibly diverse, particularly when Neal worked over at Marvel, which usually had everyone looking bigger than life, everyone was drawn by Buscema, by Heck, by Kirby, by Ditko. Suddenly Neal Adams was there, and oh my God! This is what the X-Men would look like if real people were wearing those costumes. I was bowled over! Then of course at that time more books were giving credits.

When Barry Windsor-Smith first broke in the scene, of course at first he was just a pretty mediocre Jack Kirby clone and then he got good at that and suddenly he just changed into something totally original! He was a major influence and he created these really illustrative backdrops, often for no real reason. He replaced the standard shock line with what looks like solid shapes coming out in perspective from the source, and I started using that quite regularly in my early work as well. Gene Colan (and Neal Adams) who did the scattered cards approach of panel layout, where instead of the panels being regimented into tiers, they just sort of throw them onto the page and let them scatter where they may.

Then you realize this is no longer a variation on the comic strip where everything stayed in tiers, because comic strips stayed in tiers, sometimes it would be full pages. There were obvious exceptions in the 1940s, even Shuster in the 1940s he did circular panels and other things. But nothing quite as dramatic as what happened later where you realize we've got a rectangular, a big on-end rectangle to play with, and that's what we can play with. You can divide it in any type of permutation, any configuration, you want with it, you can do tiny panels, you can do insets.

Suddenly it was like a whole new game, but one of the things that I learned, I did do a lot of those rectangular zig-zagging panels in my early *Avengers*, and then I started getting away from that, you very seldom see that in my work anymore because I realize as good as that is, it distracts from the

storytelling. Because suddenly you realize, well, it looks good that way but now it just looks like what were drawing it this way because we can't fit the character here so we just need more space here. To me it looked like a need of the art because of bad planning, as opposed to a legitimate reason to tell the story.

Now for some people it's natural. I can't even imagine what a lot of the Gene Colan books would look like if they had to be strictly regimented into squares and rectangles. He needs that, it's part of his style because his style is so diffused so his layout should look diffused, but I found for me it was too gimmicky and also it forced me to have to, like, if I'm using a big slanted panel then obviously all the panels next to it have to be affected and sometimes it isn't a good fit. So I find that working like when you do a movie, when they break up a movie into multi-panels, multi-screens, they're still rectangle and squares, or on a rare occasion a circle.

JLA/Avengers #3

So I started leaving it there and keeping that as my layout approach, and unless I'm going really surreal where I know that this is the type of stuff that would have suited a Colan or a Ditko, then I say OK let me abandon a sense of normalcy because now it plays a purpose. It's like having too many small panels on a page and doing nothing but that. It loses it's emphasis when everything looks like that. So I save that for another time.

RD: So when you are approaching laying out a page, are you doing any like preliminary layout sketches on paper then going "Ok, I like this one better than that one?"

GP: No not anymore, I stopped storyboarding. I do a lot of erasing. The thing is sometimes I erase so much, the only time I use other paper is when I erase out the good tooth of the paper that I not only will my pencil line will have a hard time, but I know any inker will be bleeding through. Sometimes I'll erase it so many times I'll just have to abandon the page. On rare occasions I may abandon a panel, but then there are too many other things in another panel to where I will use a lightbox to transfer the artwork to another page. So I have done that. I did that a lot on *JLA/Avengers* because there were so many times that I said like "Batman is not big enough here. The other character looks great, I'd hate to have to redraw that panel." So I just would lightbox Batman at a slightly larger and replace his figure and replace that figure there.

Again in the case of *JLA/Avengers,* because the story was so large and I had only 4 issues and 48 pages per issue to fit that entire story, I had to make sure it would all fit in. Because one of the things artists have to think about that sometimes writers forget, is the size relationship if one character to another. When I'm doing team books in particular, like say the *Avengers,* and both Goliath and the Wasp, if I want to be able to show them as characters, I have to be able to do things that emphasizes that, I can't have too many things going on in the page. If Giant Man is doing something and all the other people are doing something, you're never going to see the Wasp, and you're not going to see most of the smaller characters.

Sometimes I have to do a rough breakdown just to prove to myself that I can fit that action in. It has to be a large shot so I can show Giant Man, and an angle where I can show the Wasp, and see that I can get that all in the amount of space that I need to be able to fit the whole story into a 22 page package. So on that occasion I will do that, because writers do tend to forget that. Or sometimes they ask for a lot of stuff that might be able to fit on a page, but where are you going to put a word balloons anywhere in that artwork?

RD: On the rare occasions where you get to ink your own work, how much actual penciling do you do?

GP: Yeah and one of the great things about sketching is it gets you the exercise so you feel a little more free with your work. Also when I'm doing sketches I'm drawing a large face. I don't really get that many calls to do a large face in the stories I do. So the bulk of it I do pencil for other inkers to ink me, even if I am going to ink it myself, I put a lot of detail. I sometimes put all the blacks in, even though I know I'm going to have to cover that up.

RD: Even when you are inking it?

GP: Even when I'm inking it, because I want to see how light and dark acts on each other. There are some artists who will

do that naturally, they'll need to be able to do that. Mike Mignola seldom puts blacks on his pages, and he obviously thinks in highlights.

RD: Doesn't Mignola just seemingly start with a black page and just strip away what isn't needed?

GP: And he's amazing at it! But that fact that he can't in his mind see where light and dark work against each other, it's fascinating. It's not something that comes to me naturally because I do stuff with a lot more detail than Mike does. A lot of the stuff I tend to pencil tightly because certain things I don't want to find after I've inked it. I'd rather use a pencil then use white-out. There are some things that I will not notice until I get into the final inking stages because usually I will pencil a page and ink it the next day. If I'm going to be penciling it complete, because it's a lot of work to pencil a page completely, but that also gives me the advantage to say "Ok now I'll ink it the next day" so I don't feel like I'm just covering the same ground in a short amount of time.

And then I may see something I didn't see before, like an eye not being lined up correctly, or a muscle not being quite right, or things that, you know, this character isn't as big as he should be a in relationship to the perspective that I've chosen. Then I would do the touch-ups before I ink. I don't mind it inking it, basically drawing it twice. Some people draw very loosely and then go straight to ink because they don't want to draw the same thing twice. They don't want to lose a bit of the spontaneity which I know sometimes get sacrificed in my work.

AN OLD TELEVISION SHOW LOCATED IN NEW YORK USED TO STATE THAT "THERE ARE EIGHT MILLION STORIES IN THE NAKED CITY." DOCTOR LIGHT FIRMLY WISHES THAT THIS WASN'T ONE OF THEM...
THE LIGHT FANTASTIC!
I TOLD YOU, DONNA, I DON'T WISH TO DISCUSS THIS ANY FURTHER.
AND I'M TELLING YOU, KORY, YOU CAN'T LET FRANKLIN'S DEATH EAT YOU UP THIS WAY.
IT'S BEEN TWO MONTHS NOW.
I WAS IN LOVE WITH HIM, DONNA. AND THEN HE WAS KILLED.
YOU'VE GOT TO SNAP OUT OF IT.
HOW CAN YOU EXPECT ME TO FORGET THAT?
I DON'T SIMPLY WANT YOU TO MOVE ON. FRANKLIN WAS PART OF YOUR LIFE, AND THAT WON'T CHANGE...
...BUT YOU CAN'T ISOLATE YOURSELF ON THAT. YOU'VE GOT TO CARRY ON...AND PICK UP THE PIECES OF YOUR OWN LIFE.
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The New Teen Titans V1, #19

But I also have a lot of balls that I'm juggling at the same time, because of the heavy density of detail, that I don't want to screw it up. I ink with a quill almost exclusively, not because of the choice that it provides a really razor type line, it's that I'm so double jointed I can't control a brush. I tried using a brush earlier on but I couldn't control it because the brush kept giving way. By inking with a quill, I feel the paper, I know exactly how much pressure I'm putting on I feel the resistance. One of the things I know that inkers don't like when working with pens is the scratching sound. Because when you're using a brush, you're laying ink in. When you're using a pen you're etching it in, you're engraving into the page.

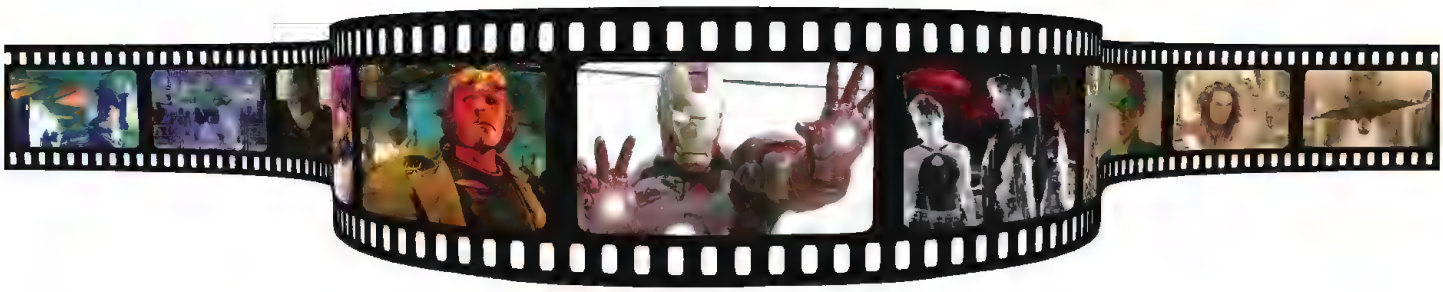
When I first started, again I wanted to see what my work would look like when inked, so I penciled really, really tight and dark, including putting in black. If I drew a space scene I would draw around the stars, and Joe Sinnott said he had to erase everything and just follow the impression of what was there because I was engraving my artwork in there. Again I was trying so hard to make it look like a finished product, I forgot that's the inkers job. One of the things I had to learn, particularly a marriage with a great inker is the most beautiful thing in the comics world, is that what the reader ever sees is the inker, he never sees the pencils, they have been erased! It's the inkers interpretation of the pencils that he is seeing. So the truer the inker can be to your work, the more satisfied you are going to be. So trying to find an inker who respects your line is a godsend.

When I ink someone else, yes I add some of the extra noodling, but not at the expense the person I'm inking, I will not change their faces because that is something that is distinctive to them. I will correct mistakes sometimes, and the editor will ask me can you make this thing a little more shadowy, because they know I'm an artist that can do that type of thing. Or in the case of a recent book with one of my idols, Jose Garcia Lopez, I was inking Teen Titans characters. Jose expected and wanted me to feel free to bring them to look like the Titans. Because he said, "You will make my work look better because it will make my work look the characters I'm supposed to be drawing if I'm off." Again he is a penciller who understands that too. Being a penciller, if I am inking, I will not ink to grandstand. We all try to do a service to the person who's come before us. I try to do a proper service to the a writer, the inker does a proper service to the penciller, and then the scripting make it a cohesive whole. And the colorist of course, now in the computer age, to add his part to the storytelling.

RD: Have you added any computer tech to your process?

GP: No, not really. I did some paste up work with a computer printout on *The Infinity Gauntlet*. There were some signs where we actually did the lettering on a computer to create a sign through a bar door and you see the Hulk on the other side of it. Because it was easier to paste that in then draw around it than try to draw the lettering and not smudge it, but I'm a lousy letterer! I think I did letter a 2 page story for Malibu once. It's the only book I ever lettered. I just used one of the fonts that were available from the internet at that point.

This interview is taken from the video interview conducted with George and can be found on Creator Chronicles: The Interviews 2007-2014, available on Bluray and a limited-edition signed DVD. For more information or to order this Bluray, please visit http://www.amdalemedia.com/ccvideo.shtml.



Two Decades of Comic Book Movies Part 4

The Marvel Studios Movies

In the previous three articles in this series, we have covered all the groundwork in comic book movies that have ushered in the recent crop of incredible comic movies. The rich history and massive creativity of the comics industry had so much to offer that it seemed Hollywood would have been jumping at the chance to turn these great characters and their wild, imaginative stories, into amazing movies. Alas, it would take decades before any concentrated attempt would be made to even try, often owing to the large technical challenges of making a man fly, or shoot laser beams out of his eyes, or transform themselves physically, which wouldn't be laughed off the screen. There were more forays into television, where the expectations were be much lower, that many comic characters would have their stories told and be seen for the first time. This would grow the most starting in the 70s and continue to the present day.

Movies held a larger promise, and had to deliver much more especially visually. The stakes were much higher, and efforts were slower until genre movies like *Star Wars* became popular and technical hurdles were overcome, but the biggest hurdle was the perception that comic book movies should be simple and funny and only for young children. The rise of comic collecting among adults from the 60s onwards, along with the trend in the 80s for more realistic characterizations in comic stories helped move the perception that perhaps comic movies could be for a wider, and older, audience.

The 1978 ***Superman*** movie, with its more literate take and grown up tone, helped open doors in this area. Unfortunately, for about a decade, this promise was not followed through on, and many of the follow up movies in the wake of *Superman* reverted to comic relief rather than comic book. The action would be there, but the stories and characters would be simplistic and rife with jokes and gags that were born out of general slapstick rather than rising organically from anything about the characters or stories. With ***Batman*** in 1989, that began to change, but it would be sporadic for a while longer. Through many years of drought, good and bad attempts, fits and starts, loyal comic fans were patiently pining for the time when comic book movies would finally get *good.*

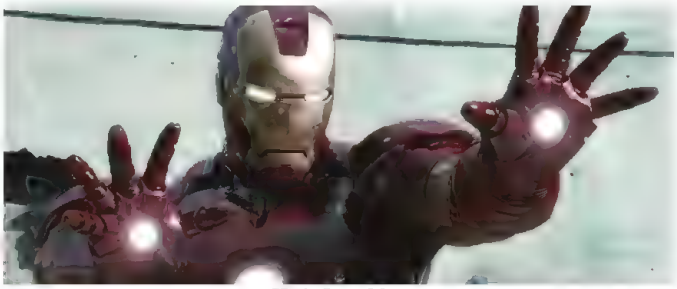
With all these building blocks over the decades, it was inevitable that someone would finally figure out how to deliver quality comic book movies that could both satisfy the fanbase and capture the imagination of the general public. The one that finally figured that out in a consistent way was Marvel.

Marvel Studios was formed out the remnants of the Marvel Films initiative, which flamed out in the wake of Marvel Entertainment's bankruptcy. From the ashes rose a Phoenix of a different kind. Betting that a fresh, original-comic-source-centric approach would solve the puzzle and reap the rewards, Marvel Studios in 2004 hired David Maisel as its new CEO and embarked on an ambitious plan to take complete control of production. Marvel spent a couple of years regaining rights it had licensed out since the 90s and created an initial raft of characters it would be focusing the new movies on. This original plan changed a bit prior to the release of their first film, but many now-familiar characters were included even back then: Ant-Man, The Avengers, Captain America and Black Panther.

With the addition of Kevin Fiege as president of production in 2007, a move that would become crucial to the future success of the movies, and a bold, clear new business plan that would create a shared, unified universe with deep roots to the source comics, Marvel raised $525 million to cover the production of an initial 10 films. The first of these would become an instant hit, and well on its way to being a classic super hero movie: *Iron Man.*

Released in 2008 to much anticipation by the comics industry, and an initial "Iron Who?" by the mainstream media, ***Iron Man*** hit movie screens like a repulsor blast and signaled to all watching that Marvel Studios had just become a major player in Hollywood.

Brash, arrogant and a genius, Tony Stark is not your typical angst-ridden super hero. Indeed, he isn't a hero at all, being the CEO of Stark Industries, a high-end weapons manufacturer. Tony lives the life of a billionaire and exists in a world where he makes his own rules. That world is shattered when a trip to a middle-eastern region to conduct a weapons demonstration for potential buyers turns into a fight for life when Tony's convoy is attacked. Tony is taken captive and attempts are made to save his life, but a problem remains: pieces of shrapnel lie dangerously close to his heart. In order to prevent the shrapnel from moving and killing him, Tony engineers a device called a small Arc reactor, a self-contained high-energy power source that sits in the middle



He is Iron Man

of his chest. This device is a miniaturized version of technology that was developed at Stark Labs, only now instead of potentially powering a city, it is holding back the shrapnel that threaten Tony's life.

Kept prisoner in a cave deep in the mountains, Tony is directed by the rebels to build them some missiles based off of some Stark tech they have acquired. Instead, Tony uses his time to construct a crude suit of mechanized armor to effect an escape. Tony lays waste to the rebel base and escapes. Once he has returned home he holds a press conference where he announces a halt to all weapons research and manufacturing, sending his business partner Obidiah Stane into damage control of both Tony and the market.

Tony And Pepper Almost Have A Moment

As he tinkers with a more streamlined and advanced version of the armored suit, Tony spends some time reflecting on his capture. He is bothered by what he has seen and how his weapons tech has fallen into the wrong hands. Once the suit is complete, and after a few test flights, he sees a news report showing the rebels have taken over a village and are threatening the villagers. He dons the armor and takes flight, confronting the rebels and taking them all out, and their tank, in short order. Iron Man is officially born.

What follows is a power struggle between Tony and a duplicitous Stane, who was behind the initial attack on the convoy, and who has gathered the pieces of the original armor suit from the desert and reverse engineered it into a larger, enhanced battle armor, wants the Arc reactor tech to power it. After incapacitating Tony and leaving him for dead, Stane and Tony eventually face off in a Mano-a-Mano showdown between an underpowered Iron Man and Stane's enhanced Mark I, now a nine foot tall monstrosity.

The movie is fantastic. It exists as a example of a near-perfect super hero origin story, and fully captures the essence of the source material but also giving it a modern, contemporary feel. This is one of the best examples of how to handle a comic-to-screen adaptation and make it work, telling a thrilling story with fully fleshed out characters, smart writing, and believable effects. The movie has four screenwriters, and it is rare for a stew with that many cooks to taste so good.

In the greatest casting coup since Christopher Reeve was chosen for *Superman*, Marvel got notorious Hollywood bad boy Robert Downey, Jr. to play Tony Stark. Perfect casting doesn't get any better than this, and Downey is not only up to the challenge but contributed a lot to the character's mannerisms, attitude and even dialogue. The movie was famously off-script in many parts when it came to Tony and his interactions with the other characters. Allowing RDJ to play with the material and find the correct way to portray the character paid off immensely. So complete and true is his portrayal, that no other actor could seem right for the part. Luckily, RDJ is signed on at least through the last *Avengers* movie in 2019, so the main Phases of the Marvel movies will be completed with him in place.

The Iron Monger

The rest of the cast is also superb. Gwyneth Paltro is sublime as Pepper Pots, Tony's personal assistant and right hand in business. Gwyneth breathes some very vital life into a character that could easily have gotten lost in the sea of techno gadgetry and corporate intrigue. Pepper comes across as capable, loyal and smart, qualities that Marvel cultivates in the portrayals of their characters, especially women. Jeff Bridges as Stane brings his A-game to the party. Stane is obviously a hard-nosed CEO, and Bridges plays him with just the right amount of menace, balancing the character's strong worldview and the needs of the company against his fondness and personal history with Tony. RDJ and Bridges had spent a lot of time going over their scenes, trying out alternate versions of line readings, and it shows in their performances, which feel natural and are never forced. As the bad guy, Bridges plays Stane as more realistic and believable than your typical megalomaniac.

Director John Favreau, who is himself an actor turned director and even plays Tony's chauffer and bodyguard, keeps things lively and exciting while maintaining visual clarity, something not always accomplished in big, effects driven action films. This was definitely a Big Movie to step up to, and Favreau showed he had the chops for it, keeping the pace fast where it needs, slow where it counts, and the tone always right on the money. The movie never drags or feels too weighty, yet has some real moments of drama among the fun and games. The movie exists in that place where you always wished a comic book movie would go: full of surprises, smart actions and dialogue, and characters that ring true and that you care about.

Special mention should be made of the music. The heavy metal inspired soundtrack grinds and bumps with heavy riffs and a chunking beat. AC/DC's Back in Black can be heard playing in the background in the initial convoy attack, and Black Sabbath's Iron Man is played during the end credits and was used in the trailer for *Iron Man* 1 and 2. The incorporation of pop and rock songs would become increasingly important in the Marvel movies going forward, helping to better tie the movies in to pop culture and contemporary audiences.

Another important idea is introduced in *Iron Man*, that of technology in the Marvel movies being a bit more futuristic than we have now. This allows a bit more latitude in the portrayal of fantastic gadgets, and they rarely get too far out there to break the willful suspension of disbelief. This near-future tech is never explained or expounded upon, it just is. This kind of smart expectation in the audience - that they would be just expected to follow along and keep up - is an aspect that is usually missing in most action, and especially sci-fi, movies, where these elements are typically dumbed-down.

As a bonus, after the credits have rolled we are treated to an additional scene. The scene features Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury, eyepatch and all (no cigar though), talking to Tony about something called The Avengers Initiative. These scenes would become standard on all MCU movies going forward. Some would have a scene that would show after the main cast credits, called a mid-credits scene.

These end credits scenes showed that these movies all existed in the same universe and were part of a shared story. Something major was brewing, and all these disparate heroes would soon cross over into each others movies and be brought together. This structure would be termed

the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and would serve to create momentum from movie to movie and build up audience anticipation for future releases.

The huge positive reaction surprised a lot of people, especially the response from the mainstream public who were still not quite accustomed to seeing a non-*X-Men*, *Batman* or *Superman* comic book movie as an event.

Following on the heels of *Iron Man* was 2008's ***The Incredible Hulk***. This would be a reboot from the interesting but unfulfilling 2003 Ang Lee directed effort. With a new lead actor in Edward Norton, this Hulk would eschew an origin and hew closer to the central themes of a man with a horrifying condition he must struggle to control, and those who would want to control him. The story is essentially a retread, though told and acted a bit better.

It Isn't Easy Being Green. It's Even Harder When You're Angry

Bruce Banner (Edward Norton) has a problem, and that problem can cause a lot of damage. Turning into a giant green rage-monster when pushed too far, the Hulk is hunted relentlessly by Banner's girlfriend's father, General Ross (the always dependable William Hurt) who wishes to use the Hulk's problem to create a line of super soldiers. Banner has become a recluse in Brazil in an attempt to stay calmer by helping others in need. Eventually General Ross tries the process on one promising marine, Emil Blonsky (Tim Roth) who goes through a few stages of transformation before Hulking up to become The Abomination.

What follows is a predictable punch-out finale (hey, it's The Hulk after all) across the rooftops of Harlem that is some fun with fantastic effects, but less than it could have been. While the final showdown is a similar old-vs-new confrontation, it lacks the character build up that *Iron Man* had with Tony vs. Stane, so we care only about the visuals and not the subtext.

This is the one MCU movie that really feels out of place in the greater scheme. Aside from "introducing" the character within the MCU and the after credits scene (itself basically a throwaway scene just to have Stark say "we're putting a team together"), very few other significant elements from this movie carries over into any other movie or the larger MCU story that is being told.

Tony Gets Whiplash At The Races

The Incredible Hulk was a better received movie than its predecessors and gives us a closer, though still only mildly successful, rendition of ol' Greenskin. We would have to wait a few more years for a big screen Hulk that would truly capture people's imagination.

While *Iron Man* was a huge success and other movies were in the pipeline already, it would still be nearly 2 years until the next Marvel Studios movie would come out. The planning and execution of the next batch of movies, which would collectively be called the Phase One movies, would lay the primary foundation for what would soon be termed The Marvel Cinematic Universe, and in the process create a few new franchises along the way.

With *Iron Man* taking off so strongly, and the previous decade since *Blade* of critically well received and financially successful comic book movies, Marvel's rich history and catalog of over 5,000 characters became an attractive target for acquisition. In late 2009, Disney swooped in out of the blue and purchased Marvel outright for over $4 billion dollars. This raised many eyebrows as well as some concerns about possible changes to the production of the budding MCU. Disney took a largely hands-off approach, leaving the production to the creative people had been successfully guiding things so far.

Iron Man 2 (2010) was a highly anticipated sequel, coming just two years after the first. The main thrust of the movie has Tony slowly dying from being poisoned by the very thing keeping him alive — the mini arc reactor in his chest. He has concocted an elixir drink he must consume frequently to slow down the process, with the effect of turning Tony into a bit of a drunk with even less inhibitions and poorer personal judgment than his already lax standards. Nick Fury pays a visit to help motivate Tony to dig deeper to find a solution. He sets Agent Romanoff to watch over Tony and monitor his progress and behavior.

Meanwhile, an old Russian scientist partner of Tony's father is dying, and his son, Ivan Vanko, wants revenge on the Stark family for cutting dad out of the arc reactor tech they co-developed decades ago. He has fashioned two plasma whips as weapons using the same power source and attacks Tony at race in Monaco. What follows is a standout action sequence of the movie, as Tony has to dodge the flailing whips while trying to suit up from a compact version of the suit stored in a suitcase.

Tony also has to deal with an ambitious competitor to his arms business, Justin Hammer. Hammer breaks Vanko out of prison to work on his competing line of autonomous robotic Iron Man-like drones. The finale has Tony and Rhodey taking on these drones and Valko in a well done, but a bit too brief, showdown.

Screenwriter Justin Theroux does what he can with the material, but when you come down to it, it's just too many elements going on to juggle. Between having to keep some of the overall MCU elements going, to two villains, S.H.I.E.L.D., Agent Romanoff, Rhodey suiting up, and the ongoing development of Tony's character and his maturing relationship with Pepper, the movie is overstuffed with too many ideas to follow.

The middle of the movie nearly derails the entire show when Tony, his behavior becoming increasingly erratic due to being "drunk" on the restorative juice, gets a little too wild at his birthday party, and his Army pal Rhodey dons one of the suits to shut things down. This devolves into the very thing we all want to avoid in a modern super hero movie: one hero fighting another for no real reason. It's a step back to the comic book days of "and the heroes fight each other over a misunderstanding/disagreement" making it feel trite and forced. This plays as a poor man's version of the "Demon in a Bottle" storyline from the comics, but without the context of that story's personal failures and deeply internal struggle, it just doesn't pull off the resonance it needs.

Where the movie redeems itself a bit in this regard is in the next part where Tony has to take another shot at developing a more stable power source that is less harmful to him. This is one problem he can't blast or punch his way out of, and must rely on his intellect and creativity, and a little help from his father's old research. By applying himself in a constructive way, Tony is finally able to synthesize the correct power source and stop the poisoning of his body.

Once again casting and a high caliber of acting breathes life into the proceedings. RDJ's Tony and Paltro's Pepper continue to evolve their relationship, with he finding a path to maturity and heroism and she responding in ways she wouldn't have back when Tony was a self-centered womanizer. It helps that the actors are so good with dialogue and interaction, because it is swift with lots of repartee and one-liners, almost overlapping like a Mamet play. It is all delivered with polish and veracity, and they bring believability to the characters that invests you in their fates.

He Gets By With A Little Help From His Friend

Sam Rockwell as Justin Hammer is well cast, but the role is too lightweight and undermines what should be a viscous and dangerous rival to Tony. Better cast is Mickey Rourke, on something of a comeback in recent years, as Ivan Vanko. Complete with a full Russian accent, Rourke brings to Vanko a real feeling of deep-seated and bitter hatred combined with a lethal determination. Scarlett Johansson as Agent Romanoff (a.k.a. Black Widow) makes an impactful debut as a kick-butt S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, besting Tony's bodyguard Happy Hogan in a training session and later clearing out a roomful of heavies while Happy handles just one. Don Cheadle smoothly steps into Rhodey's shoes, replacing Terrence Howard. Clark Gregg as Agent Phil Coulson begins to take a larger role in MCU movies starting here as well, showing a lot more personality and builds the character from a bit part in the first *Iron Man* into a capable agent and eventually a beloved character in his own right.

The movie is a bit of a mixed bag. It is well known that the production was rushed, which director Favreau was not happy about, and there wasn't a completed script. Many of the scenes feel ad-libbed, and it's a testament to all involved that it works as well as it does, which in large part can be attributed to the great casting choices with excellent actors and a director who keeps it all together. The movie had a lot to live up to after the nearly perfect *Iron Man*, but it felt like it came up a bit short in comparison, even though it was still a big hit and another huge financial success.

He Has The Power!

Of all the Phase 1 Marvel movies, ***Thor*** (2011) is the one that had the most difficult task of being brought to the screen. How do you take a god and make him relatable and entertaining, all while retaining the mythological storytelling and setting? This was the dilemma facing the production team of Thor.

At its heart, Thor is a movie about second chances and changes of heart. Asgard is infiltrated during a ceremony that was about to put Thor (played by Chris Hemsworth) on the throne, where he would succeed his father Odin (a very fitting Anthony Hopkins), by Asgard's eternal enemies The Frost Giants. They break into Asgard's vault and Thor, against the command of his father, gathers his friends The Warriors Three and Sif stage a raid to the Frost Giant's realm to punish them for their incursion, nearly starting a huge war. Odin comes to the rescue and cooler heads prevail.

As punishment for breaking the ages-old truce Asgard had with the Frost Giants, Odin strips Thor of his power and banishes him to the Earthly realm, where he will hopefully learn some humility and responsibility. His legendary hammer, Mjolnir, is sent there as well and given the sword-in-the-stone treatment with the words "whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor" inscribed on it by Odin. It has crashed to earth, where it was discovered at the end of *Iron Man* by a pre-S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent Coulson.

Thor is discovered by Jane Foster (Natalie Portman) and her team of astronomers (Eric Selvig played by Stellan Skarsgard and Kat Dennings as their assistant Darcy), who have been investigating the strange phenomena surrounding the arrival of Thor. Thinking he is just some random guy in the desert, they take him to the hospital where he escapes and talks them into taking him to the site where the hammer is. Once there, he is unable to lift the hammer off the ground, nor is anyone else able to. With doubt spiraling from his new friends and his own confusion, Thor begins to grow and see his past behavior in a new light. Seeing the mortal life and its limits through the eyes of Jane Foster and her team, Thor comes to feel compassion and kinship with the Earthly realm and its inhabitants.

Meanwhile, back at Asgard, Odin has fallen into a coma and Loki, Thor's brother, has positioned himself as interim king, with the plan to make that position permanent once he has eliminated Thor. He sends the Destroyer, a powerful robot that guards the Asgardian vault, to destroy Thor on Earth. In the ensuing battle, The Warriors Three and Sif join him to confront the Destroyer. In the end, Thor pleads through the Destroyer to Loki to spare the Earth and only take him. When the Destroyer essentially kills Thor, the words on Mjolnir are triggered and it flies across the desert to his now-resurrected hand, restoring him to his full power and glory.

Of all the MCU movies, *Thor* strays the most from some of its core comic book source. Gone is the Donald Blake alter ego along with his striking of the walking cane to turn into Thor. In its place we have a more complex character that is going through a crisis of conscience in ways that were rarely delved into in the comic. Chris Hemsworth shows great facility with not only the high English mode of speech and arch-demigod lifestyle, but also in the quieter and reflective moments and internal transformation the character goes through.

What could have easily been a massive guffawfest given the pseudo-Shakespearian archaic Olde English dialect, mythic Nordic gods, and a bizarre mixture of fantasy with SciFi, is instead handled with dignity and a willingness to play the material straight. What humor is in the movie is either universal, such as when a victorious Thor approaches the throne of his father in an obnoxiously celebratory way, or grows out of the situation and the characters, such as when a de-powered Thor is

brought down by a sedative injection while loudly proclaiming his invincibility. The fish-out-of-water setting works well to humanize the character.

While the entire cast does a good job, the real find here is Tom Hiddleston as Loki. By turns charming and deceitful, he infuses Loki with verve and purpose and brings dimension to a character that could have easily been a one-note or cliché villain. When Loki finds out about his true parentage, Hiddleston lays bare the character's heartbreak and rage, and what remaining shackles of familial affection he harbored are obliterated for good. Loki's secretive machinations to manipulate the situation with the Frost Giants and position himself as de facto ruler of Asgard are subtle and layered, and Hiddleston delivers note-perfect delivery on all his scenes. He elevates the material and gives the MCU its first significant super villain that will stand the test of time. We can't wait to see what devious trouble he will get Loki into again.

The Star Spangled Man Leads The Charge!

Thor was surprisingly well received, considering he is not as well known a comic character to the general public. The combination of charm, wit, and an effective handling of the disparate elements of the mythology under the sure hand of director Kenneth Branagh, elevate Thor from what could have been a disaster to a good – but not necessarily great – comic book take on the character. It is a testament to Marvel's increasing ability to find a relevant take on classic characters and how to translate them to the screen.

Captain America: The First Avenger (2011) is another difficult to adapt character, given his heroic and patriotic similarity to Superman and other heroes with high moral values. Given all the previous emphasis on flashy, modern filmmaking techniques and vivid action sequences in the previous movies, *Captain America* takes a surprisingly traditional approach. Taking place entirely in the World War II, it eschews bombast to tell a more honest and simple story. This approach is surprisingly effective in conveying the old world values and attitudes of the film's setting, and creates a more romantic and grounded tone. Directed by the sure and experienced hand of Joe Johnston, it delivers a solid meat-and-potatoes movie that is exciting and with a different feel from all the other Marvel movies.

Cap Confronts His Predecessor

Once again casting strength comes to the fore and delivers spot-on actors for key roles. Chris Evans, who had already played the super hero Johnny Storm, here delivers a much deeper, sincere performance as a spindly and weak, but brave, Steve Rogers. We come to really understand Steve's and care about his welfare. When he is beset by a thug he never backs down, declaring to the thug "I can do this all day," but lacking size and skills, he takes a walloping. When is best friend Bucky later asks him about his repeated attempts to enlist after having been rejected every time, Steve's response is "There are men laying down their lives. I go no right to do any less than them."

It is in these scenes that we get to really know the man that resides inside of Steve's underdeveloped body. When he later throws himself onto a "live" dud training grenade when all others scatter, he earns the respect of Army command and ours as well. He proves himself to be an honest, brave, regular guy that just wants to be given the chance, all before he is given any powers. Indeed it his very character that earns him the chance to gain those powers. Chris Evans does a masterful job of conveying all of Steve's strengths and weaknesses, both before and after he is put through the Vita Ray process that turns him into a super soldier specimen of physical perfection.

After gaining those powers and becoming "Captain America," a patriotic character designed to sell war bonds and rally Americans to the cause, and given the honorary rank of Captain, Steve Rogers finds the use of his new power limited to things like holding up a motorcycle with three women seated on it, making him little more than a glorified cheerleader. When Bucky and his unit are trapped behind enemy lines and taken prisoner, Rogers concocts a rescue plan without the consent of his commander by accepting the help of Agent Carter (a very capable Haley Atwell) and a young Howard Stark (Dominic Cooper) and parachuting in for a bold, daring rescue.

At the installation, Johann Schmidt, an ambitious and ruthless agent of HYDRA, a paramilitary terrorist organization bent on world domination, has located a mysterious glowing cube of incredible power called the Tesseract (introduced in the *Thor* after-credits scene) and is working to harness its energies for his own dark ambitions. Schmidt reveals he was the first to take an early version of the Super Soldier serum, which has left him scarred with a ruby red face and skull, which earned him the colorful moniker The Red Skull.

When Rogers leads the rescued unit back to camp, the name Captain America is invoked, only this time with legitimacy and respect. Rogers is given command of a unit and tasked with disrupting HYDRA operations throughout Europe. All of this leads to a final confrontation aboard a massive flying wing aircraft over the Arctic resulting in the loss of the Tesseract and Captain America into the frozen wastes.

The effects are effective and in many places subtle. With a movie that is more grounded in time period and character, there is less call for effects that are overt and showy as in other movies. What is left is a somewhat more grounded approach, even though we are talking about laser guns in World War II and other near-future type tech. In the many montage-like battle scenes, digital effects blend seamlessly with the practical effects and rarely distract. It all meshes very well and doesn't feel out of place or get ridiculous in its presentation.

In an impressive display of digital wizardry, bulky and brawny Chris Evans is digitally shrunken (in both height and musculature) to portray weak and scrawny Steve Rogers, interacting directly with other actors. The illusion is so convincing that when we see Steve come out of the Vita Ray machine as a buff hunk O' man, we had forgotten that is how Chris Evans always looks. Captain America is a linchpin character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, so getting him this right and done so well is a major accomplishment.

Everything leading up to completing Phase One was taken in careful steps, partially to make sure things were done right and partially because, this was all new for Marvel and even with the significant success of *Iron Man*, *Thor* and *Captain America*, an ongoing trend of successful, breakout movies wasn't any kind of certainty just yet. That doubt would be blown out of the water definitively with ***The Avengers*** (2012), which went on to not only become the 3rd highest grossing movie in history at that time, but had a staggering $207 million opening weekend, a record which was only beaten (by less than $1 million) by *Jurassic World* last year, and then *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* massive $248 million opening weekend in December.

When Loki breaks into a secret S.H.I.E.L.D. research facility and steals the Tesseract, Nick Fury implements the Avengers Initiative, a response team made up of the super powered, and in the case of Thor, godlike, beings that have sprung up recently around the world. Loki, working at the behest of an alien power who freed him from Asgard after the destruction of the Bifrost in the first *Thor* film, is to be given an army to invade earth after he has secured the Tesseract for his benefactor.

Strength In Numbers. And A Hulk

What follows is one of the most fun and refreshing comic book movies ever made. Creating a movie of this scale, drawing in many different characters from several different movie franchises, was a daunting task. This amazing accomplishment is due to the largely free hand given to writer and director Joss Whedon. Translating these character from the comics is no easy task. Dialogue that works when read doesn't always work when spoken, to say nothing of dialogue that has to fit the pacing and beats of a scene. All of the MCU screenwriters have become adept at putting words in the mouths of the characters that works, and rings true. Whedon has honed this to a fine art having cut his teeth on dialogue-heavy character driven TV shows like Buffy and Firefly, and here he shows his considerable skill in handling an ensemble cast and a story of this magnitude.

The movie is full of wonderful character moments and sly humor. Whedon smartly keeps the characters distinct while remaining true to what had been established in the individual movies thus far. Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) and especially Black Widow are given a fair amount of screen time that fleshes out their characters and backgrounds. It is a pleasing development, and just the sort of interpersonal character building that Whedon excels at. Black Widow in particular is allowed to show more personality and becomes an essential member of the team. Johansson gives Natasha real humanity and subtlety, which manifests itself in scenes like the interrogation scene and her discussion with Barton about how she carries some of the "red in her ledger" from her past exploits. That she is able to get the better of Loki, the trickster god, is no small feat, and it is just this sort of expansion of the characters that makes Avengers such a treat. It shows just how much skill Whedon has in being able to weave big ideas and small personal moments into a large action movie and make it all work so well.

Someone This Happy Must Be Up To No Good

Tom Hiddleston once again shows the rest of the MCU how to do a memorable villain properly. The Loki conflicted by familial issues has transformed into a focused and driven instrument of cosmic powers. Hiddleston's Loki is all lewd grinning overconfidence and gleeful manipulation. Loki makes bold proclamations and grand speeches that Hiddleston is able to turn into great moments, when in lesser hands they would be laughable or fall flat. This evolution of Loki's character from the *Thor* movie to this one represents the fulfillment of all the promise of bringing comic book villains to the big screen. He is a real delight to watch, and has become the villain we can't wait to see again.

The Hulk (Mark Ruffalo brilliantly taking over the role from Edward Norton) is finally given a proper treatment. How do you give nuance to a character that flies into violent fits of rage and destroys everything in sight? Whedon delineates and deepens the character with just a few deft strokes and a handful of key scenes, and by spending a lot of time showing us Banner before the Hulk. He is also given one of the greatest lines in comic movie history. Near the end of the film, when New York is under alien attack, a giant flying alien whale-like creature heads for the team. Banner starts to move toward the oncoming creature when Cap calls to him and says "Dr. Banner! Now might be a good time to get angry," to which banner replies "That's my secret Cap. I'm *always* angry," immediately transforms into the Hulk, and stops the oncoming whale alien with a single punch.

The impact of this scene, and its implications that there is one Hulk that Banner has some control over and one that is a complete rage monster, instantly transforms his character arc and our understanding of him. That single line and the idea behind it redefine the character and finally created a connection with audiences. He also has one of the funniest scenes in any movie, ever, when Loki, who is mid-rant about how he will not be trifled with by simple mortals, is grabbed by the Hulk by the ankles proceeds to slam him back and forth like a rag doll, pummeling him into the ground, then leaving him incapacitated and stating "Puny god!" as he walks away. The Hulk had become officially cool.

The genius of Whedon's take on these characters in this origin movie is treating them like the ultimate dysfunctional family. These characters are not really heroes, Cap excepted. These are very individualistic people with their own agendas and lives who don't necessarily all like each other or agree that they can work together effectively as a team to confront the threat of Loki and his invading alien army. This inherent dysfunction is actually integral to Loki's plans, along with some prodding, counting on their disunity and egos to keep them apart and ineffective. It is pure joy watching these characters interact, argue, fight, and ultimately come together as a real team. By playing with the tropes and themes this way, Whedon establishes solid ground for all the characters and their situation, so that when they finally set aside their differences and misgivings, the audience's expectations are exuberantly fulfilled.

Part of the tremendous response to the MCU movies in general, and *The Avengers* specifically, stems from the build up of the crossovers of characters in other MCU movies. The culmination of this in *The Avengers* represented a fan's dream come true, and resonated with the general public as well. Prior to Marvel's building of a shared cinematic universe, having characters cross over into other franchise movies was done rarely, if ever. Marvel flipped that around and built crossovers into the fabric of their entire line of movies. This in turn helped fans invest in the stories and characters because they knew there would be a cumulative payoff, as well as the release of more individual films. The after credits scene, which reveals Thanos as the force behind Loki, raises the stakes and the promise for future films.

The smash success of *The Avengers* from such a broad base of moviegoers solidified Marvel as a go-to blockbuster movie machine. Every subsequent movie released was a solid, and sometimes big, hit both critically and financially. They had succeeded beyond even their wildest dreams. Marvel was working from a larger plan, a plan that would see them leverage some of their lesser-known properties (at least by mainstream standards) and turn them into huge successes in ways that would have been doubtful to previous generations of comic fans.

An Army Of Iron Men

Iron Man 3 (2013) directly follows the events of *The Avengers*, and serves as the kickoff for Phase Two of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. *IM3* finds a very different Tony Stark, who is dealing with some pretty crippling post-traumatic stress from confronting the massive alien force that was targeting Earth, and nearly sacrificing his life to save it. He is also having glitches with enhancements to his Iron Man suit and some newer versions he has cooked up. Returning are Pepper, still the heart and soul of Tony's world, Happy Hogan, and Rhodey, who has been re-christened Iron Patriot, which serves to connect the movie topically to current events.

For the first third or so of the movie the protagonist is The Mandarin (played to perfection by Ben Kingsley), an intense shadowy terrorist-slash-guru figure who releases scary manifesto-type videos and promises doom to western interests. His highly political and topical videos are some of the most effective and tension filled narratives of this nature and it's a good thing real terrorists are not this effective in their propaganda. Added to the mix is a new player: Aldrich Killian, founder of AIM, a brilliant scientist, and designer of Extremis, a new wonder drug that can heal nearly anything and even grow back limbs, but has some pretty severe side effects, like psychosis, superior physical strength, and oh yeah, the user heats up and explodes after prolonged use!

An Alliance Built On Absolutely No Trust

About halfway through the picture, one of the biggest head-fakes in movie history is brazenly pulled off when Tony, after spending considerable time trying to stay alive from an attack from The Mandarin's forces, finally tracks him down to his lair and reveals that The Mandarin is actually…Trevor, a British stage actor who was hired to play the Mandarin character publicly so the *real* Mandarin, three guesses as to who *that* is, can operate unimpeded with all the focus on the actor. It is handled so deftly that upon first viewing it is confusing what just got revealed. Then when the implications of the revelation hit, the reaction is at once shock at the audacity and then "you gotta be kidding!" at the lost opportunity to carry through on what was becoming a serious, dangerous and cool villain. Aldrich Killian, played by a game Guy Pierce, just can't match the mystery and coolness by comparison, especially after he is amped up on Extremis for the finale of the movie. This is doubly troubling because the Mandarin in the comics is Iron Man's signature arch villain, a man who can outwit and outmaneuver Tony at every turn. Indeed, the front half of the movie features these very qualities, which are then squandered on a sub-standard "evil scientist with rejection issues injects too much of his super juice and goes crazy" slugfest showdown.

Written and directed by Shane Black, he of former slam-bang action movies such as *Lethal Weapon* and *Predator*, *IM3* has a distinctly different feel from not only the previous *Iron Man* entries, but from the other MCU movies as well. The humor is harsh and seems a bit out of place, not the usual Tony Stark banter and sharp observations. The Iron Man tech is expanded almost to absurd levels, even by comic book movie standards.

Still there is a lot to like here as well. The production is once again top-notch, with amazing effects and some fun set pieces. It is nice to see a character have to deal with the fallout of a significant and traumatic event as well. The end is a chaotic, impressive finale of effects and stunts, with some very creative variations on the Iron Man suit (and featuring a LOT of Iron Man automated suits) so the scale and impact is there, even if it is less than emotionally satisfying.

While *IM3* was another big financial hit, it was less of a critical one. Complaints ranged from Tony not being in the suit enough to his seemingly out of character and even harsh interactions with his kid co-star, to a jumbled plot and villain that wasn't compelling enough, to a full deus ex machina resolution that many felt was a cop-out. The movie had a feel to it of being a bridge movie for certain elements to be introduced into the MCU at the expense of giving the audience more of an Iron Man solo outing. The tone shifts in this movie are abrupt and sometimes leave the audience guessing at what just happened. There is cleverness here, echoing Tony's damaged psyche and trying to reflect his new mood swings, but only works some of the time and more often than not undermines Tony's strong sense of self rather than build any additional insights. While not an outright failure, it is seen as a missed opportunity, especially with the drastic and head scratching left-turn on the Mandarin revelation.

Thor: The Dark World (2013) continues loosely from the events in *The Avengers* and the first *Thor* movie. Thor is now in command of Asgard forces fighting to bring order back to the nine realms following the destruction of the Bifrost that occurred at the end of *Thor*. Jane Foster has been attempting to find ways to reach Thor and accidentally reactivates an ancient power, The Aether, when it infuses her body. This awakens the original caretakers of The Aether, The Dark Elves. They want their power back so they can resume their war to eradicate the nine realms. The Aether turns out to be another infinity stone.

Returning is the entire main cast of the previous *Thor*, and everyone puts on their roles like an old shoe. The acting is solid and everyone is up for another go 'round, even if characters like the Warriors Three get a bit short shrifted this time out. Jaime Alexander as Sif is a standout in the supporting cast, but the best scenes are those that feature Loki, especially when he and Thor escape Asgard to take on the Dark Elves.

Like the previous film, the difficult task of bringing off a mythological fantasy character like Thor is handled about as well as can be expected, even if the result is less compelling than we would like. The Dark Elves, while a legitimate and powerful threat, just don't seem to click as the main protagonists. Their attack on Asgard is thrilling, as is the fallout, but after that they seem to move into the background instead of maintaining that immediacy of threat. This is good, fun entertainment that doesn't try to reach too far.

Super Soldier Vs. Super Cyborg

It is this weakness in the villains and their lack of presence in most of the MCU movies that keeps most villains from becoming memorable. With the exception of Loki and Ultron, most of the main villains in the MCU movies play more as side characters until the end. They appear for the initial conflict to set things up, then are separated from the heroes for the rest of the movie until the final act. This lack of direct confrontation throughout the movies is partially a result of having to fit so many elements in that pertain to the shared universe aspects, but also to allow more exploration of the main and supporting characters. The former results in too few memorable villains, but the latter does lend itself to a better appreciation and depth of the main characters.

The movie works best, as in the first *Thor*, when it is exploring the relationship between Thor and Loki. Their struggle with familial issues and trust is here expanded even more and allows for more exploration of the depth of the characters. Hemsworth and Hiddleston are up to the task, creating some wonderful moments in both humor and pathos. Their eventual co-operation for the resolution is both surprising and satisfying.

Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014) took on the difficult task of trying to do a major conspiracy story with echoes to current events. Mixing a super hero movie, even one as unabashedly patriotic as Cap, with competing ideologies and conflicting loyalties is fraught with danger and easy to mess up. Screenwriter Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, and directors The Russo Brothers deliver a taught and relevant movie that speaks to the modern age. It is even more amazing to realize that The Russo Brothers have never directed an action movie before.

The Motley Crew Of The Galaxy

After a fantastic opening sequence aboard a freighter on the high seas to recover some stolen data, with some byplay on ethics and honesty between Cap and Black Widow, Steve Rogers finds himself on the outs with S.H.I.E.L.D. and the government after conveying his misgivings about how those in charge are handling things in a post-terrorism world. Being marked for capture, Steve fights an elevator full of agents (really, there are like nine guys in there with him with the doors closed) and escapes and runs headlong into a massive HYDRA infiltration of all levels of government. In a spectacular car chase full of gadgetry and quick thinking, Nick Fury is attacked and appears to be killed. He later reveals himself to Cap and states he doesn't know who to trust anymore.

Cap must get to the bottom of things, which will involve a trip to an old underground facility containing the digitized mind of German scientist Arnim Zola (no, really) and taking on a new nemesis, the Winter Soldier, a powerful, mindwiped, cyborg enhanced Bucky Barnes. Cap must stop the Winter Soldier and HYDRA from initiating a plan involving three new Helicarriers capable of targeting and spying on or taking out thousands of potential hostiles, only "hostiles" here is considered anyone on the government's secret list of who they deem to be a problem. The distrust of those in power and their potential to abuse their citizens that this idea evokes is not lost on modern audiences.

Anthony Mackie is perfectly cast as The Falcon, who can fly thanks to a folding wing-enabled suit. His charisma carries his character and his budding friendship with Steve feels natural and true. Back in action is an even more morally ambiguous Black Widow, along with a much more take-charge Samuel Jackson as Nick Fury. The banter and chemistry that exists between these characters is a lot of fun and add a lot to counterbalance the more serious events of the film. New to the MCU is Robert Redford, classing the movie up by playing S.H.I.E.L.D. power broker Alexander Pierce. The major points of the conspiracy turn on his character, and Redford delivers with a far more nuanced performance than these types of characters usually get. By turns menacing and deadly, Pierce is also sufficiently rounded and grounded in his views that you can see his points of view, even if you disagree with his conclusions and methods.

The action quotient is very high in this faster paced sequel, but it never feels too busy and moves with efficiency. There are no parts that drag, nor parts that feel out of place or lose the viewer. The story is told clearly and is compelling. Without going too far into Nolanesque *Dark Knight* territory, the movie nonetheless delivers both exciting thrills and a deeper, more relevant story for the characters to react to. It is deftly done, and The Russo Brothers show how to make a smart action movie that has a somewhat esoteric, big idea plot.

The movie plays like a comic book version of *The Parallax View* or *Three Days of the Condor*, a movie Redford was also in 40 years ago but playing the other side. His scenes are among the best of the conspiracy plotline, and his presence adds considerable weight and gravity to the story and its consequences. It's quite a shift from the first film's more innocent and nascent viewpoint to *Winter Soldier's* serious and more overtly political tone, but it is one that makes *The Winter Soldier* the most mature and interesting of the Marvel movies to date.

Guardians of the Galaxy (2014) was the studio's biggest risk to date. With a cast of completely unknown characters, even to many comic fans, and going full blown space opera, this would be Marvel's make-or-break movie as they moved the entire MCU storyline into the cosmic arena. With a wry, funny script and a rocking oldies 70s pop soundtrack, director James Gunn delivered one of the most fun movies, of any genre, in ages. This would be SciFi-lite to be sure, but it would also be a

linchpin movie for the cosmic story line, as Thanos is more prominently featured as the driver of the story, even if he is still only onscreen minimally.

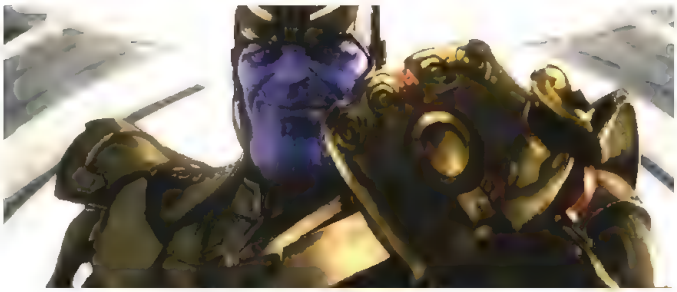
Peter Quill a.k.a. Starlord (comedic actor Chris Pratt) is a brash, wisecracking galactic thief who is being sought by Gamora (Zoe Saldana) after he steals an orb containing one of the infinity stones. Gamora is working for Ronan the Accuser (Lee Pace), who the mad titan Thanos (who is also Gamora's father) has hired to acquire for him. And that is just one of the many character plotlines running through *Guardians*. Each character is given enough motivation and background to give the viewer a good understanding and appreciation of them.

Old And New Avengers Prepare To Face Ultron!

Accompanying Quill in his adventure is Drax (wrestler Dave Bautista), a literal-minded killing machine on a mission of vengeance, bounty hunter Rocket Raccoon (voiced by Bradley Cooper with a pseudo-wiseguy accent that shouldn't work but does) a genetically engineered animal who is a genius with electronics, and Groot, Rocket's companion-slash-muscle, a tall living plant who can only utter the single phrase "I am Groot!" as his only form of verbal communication. Brought together when Gamora tires to steal the orb from Quill on Xandar, home of the Nova Corps, then thrown into a space prison where they meet Drax, this group of disparate characters end up forming an ad-hoc team to save Xandar from Ronan, who wants to annihilate the Xandarian homeworld.

If the above feels like a lot to absorb, so is the movie with its large cast of characters and relentless pace. Jam packed with action, great character moments, and overt and smart humor, director Gunn keeps all the balls in the air moving while still telling a coherent and sometimes poignant story. The soundtrack of 70s pop and rock songs in Guardians represents probably the most important use of music in any MCU movie to date. Every song fits the scenes perfectly, and is effectively used to evoke various emotions to match the onscreen events.

The effects are stellar, to borrow a pun, and give a great sense of the scale of things without being too bombastic. The storytelling is clear and exciting, and by the end of it you want to see more of these characters and their adventures. This is also the first time we get a full explanation (hinted at in *Thor: The Dark World*) of just what the Infinity Stones actually are – the remnants of the creation of the universe, distilled down to six stones. "Stones" is a bit of a misnomer, because each one has a different physical shape and state of matter.



Thanos Takes A Hand...At Last!

With its feel-good vibe, fun atmosphere, and rollicking pace, Guardians was a very pleasant surprise, and raked in the business as a result. The end credits scene features Thanos finally coming out from behind the scenes and pledging to take a direct hand himself from here out.

When it comes to big-budget action sequels, there is usually one major rule: Make it bigger. The action has to be more kinetic, the pace faster, the ideas expanded. ***Avengers: Age of Ultron*** (2015) generally delivers on this, as it ups the scale significantly from the previous film while adding some fine character development and working in larger MCU story elements that get threaded through every movie.

Joss Whedon is back as writer and director, and while the movie can be a bit uneven at times, overall it is a solid effort. Tasked with crafting a worthy story and villain, and also having to fit in the threads of the larger MCU stories, the movie sometimes overwhelms and feels crowded. Whedon handles the load like the seasoned veteran he is, having spent a good deal of time not only working on the two *Avengers* movies, but also contributing many ideas and bit parts for the other MCU movies as well. It comes across as very polished and even if it doesn't always make sense or seems to skip ahead in parts, there is still the confidence of being in good hands.

Returning is the entire main cast from *The Avengers*, picking up with the final push to capture the last of HYDRA's bases of operation. They are after Baron Strucker who has obtained Loki's staff and has been experimenting on people with it. Added to the mix this time are Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) and her twin brother Pietro (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), the result of those experiments by Baron Strucker. After retrieving it, Tony begins some experiments on it and discovers, with the help of Bruce Banner, that it contains what appears to be a highly advanced computer-like program, possibly an AI, though much larger and more sophisticated than Tony's advanced AI Jarvis.

Tony has become obsessed with securing the planet after the alien invasion from *Avengers* and sees this new AI as a way to create an automated, global security force. Convincing Bruce to aid him, he attempts to merge this new AI with Jarvis, dubbing him Ultron. The resulting artificial mind takes over one of the bodies of Tony's new Iron Man-based robots and attacks the team during a party. Ultron escapes via the network and puts into motion plans to defeat the Avengers and taking his programming to "protect the planet" literally, decides the only way to do that is to eradicate humanity from it. As he sets about implementing his plan, he kidnaps a doctor to help him create a synthetic android body to transfer his mind into. Only part of his mind is transferred when the Avengers capture the android and Thor subsequently brings it to life, fusing the Infinity Stone from the scepter, which is the Mind Stone, with the android body thus creating a powerful new ally, The Vision.

It is a take on the classic SciFi trope, with an alien mind substituting for a man-made AI. Writer/Director Whedon can always find interesting twists on old ideas and new takes on classic characters, and further develops many of the relationships he established in the first movie, this time giving us a lot of insight into Hawkeye (Renner, giving one of the best motivational speeches in these MCU movies) and creating a very special one between Black Widow and Banner/Hulk.

The interaction between Johansson and Ruffalo is handled very carefully to show their growing closeness both on the field and with budding romantic attraction that cannot be consummated. The characters, as well as the actors, show a lot of trust for one another this time around, indicating growth and acceptance of their role as a true team. Elizabeth

Olsen is the real breakout star here. She brings genuine feeling to Wanda, crafting a character full of conflicting emotions and sincere passions, bringing fully to life a comic book fan favorite.

Ultron is a worthy villain, with understandable motives and a clear worldview. He takes a more active hand in this movie, having several direct confrontations with the heroes as opposed to the more behind-the-scenes role of the villains in most MCU movies. James Spader provides the voice, and partially the look, of Ultron and he delivers a worthy performance. Spader brings a style and flair to what could have been just another yelling, angry villain. There is real danger to Ultron, and the immediacy of his actions against the Avengers delivers a lot of kinetic action and opportunities for the heroes to strut their super-powered stuff.

While Age of Ultron made a boatload of money ($191 million opening weekend, $1.4 billion total worldwide) reception to it wasn't as strong as the first movie. This is primarily due to the fact that The Avengers was such a revelation, an unexpectedly great movie with character-defining moments and great action set pieces, and because of that the bar had been significantly raised. It was seen as overstuffed, but good, just not the greatness that was the first film.

He Also Gets By With Help From A Little Friend

With ***Ant-Man*** (2015) it feels like Marvel just said "The hell with it, anything we make will sell! Let's do *Ant-Man*!" to see if they could pull off such an inherently silly concept for a character. And you know what? They did. Ant-Man is a blast! Full of nice character bits, legitimate humor, and an appealing lead character who isn't so Captain-America-sure of himself. Even though many of the MCU characters were at one time Avengers, Ant-Man seems an odd choice. However, given that the tech involved has to do with shrinking to the quantum level of reality, he may just fit in with the cosmic direction the movies are moving toward after all.

Scott Lang is a small time thief just being released from prison and committed to going straight for the sake of his young daughter. After being fired from the only menial job he could get, he agrees with his buddies to crack the safe of a wealthy retiree who is out of town. This home belongs to Henry Pym (Michael Douglas), the original Ant-Man and creator of the tech that allows a man to be shrunk to a fraction of his original size, albeit with some side effects. The entire job is a set-up, and Lang is soon caught and made an offer from Pym: Help to steal a similar technology that has been weaponized, dubbed the Yellowjacket, from Pym's old protégé Darren Cross (Corey Stoll) with the help of his daughter Hope (Evangeline Lilly) who is covertly working in cahoots with Pym while undercover at her dad's old Pymtech company with Cross. Cross has ambitious plans to sell the Yellowjacket tech to the highest bidder, a move that could spell disaster on a global scale.

The rest of the movie is a pastiche of heist, training, wisecracks, family drama, megalomaniacal maneuverings, and some of the most amazing scale effects ever seen. It moves fast, and doesn't care too much for scrutiny, relying instead on the ability of its lead characters and the overall thrust of the plot to drive it forward. The tone of most of the movie is very light, and situational and character based humor runs throughout, making *Ant-Man* more of a comedy-heist movie than a traditional super hero movie.

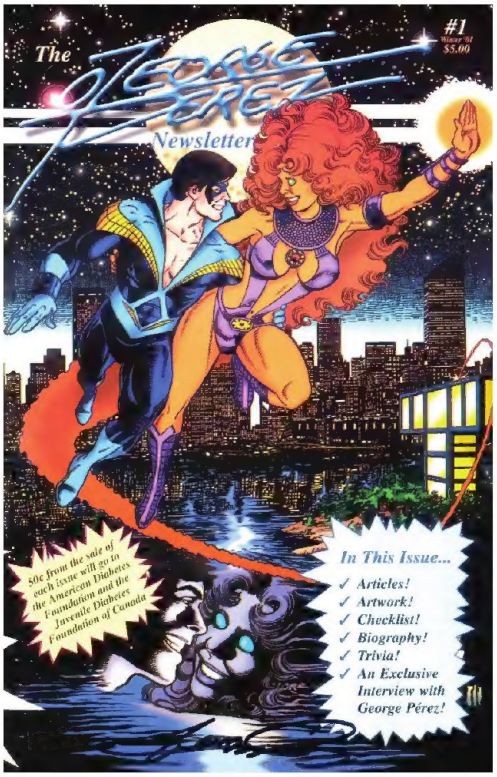
The movie is so freewheeling with its premise and technology that it pretty much ignores physics, or maybe we just have to accept that certain things just work differently in the MCU. The movie has Lang both carrying his full weight in a punch when he is half an inch tall, *and* being able to leap onto the back of a flying ant without crushing it to the ground instantly. Ah well, this is why we suspend disbelief. It is a movie best watched to have fun rather than to make logical sense.

Like *Thor* before, when faced with a patently ridiculous concept for a movie, the only way to pay it off is to play it straight. This is not to say the movie is without humor, far from it. *Ant-Man* is the most overtly comedic MCU movie to date. Rather, it is about the actors taking the story and their characters seriously within the context of the absurdities and challenges they face, a tonal balancing act that Marvel has figured out how to apply to their entire line of movies. This thematic alchemy has long been sought by those attempting to make comic book movies, and with their rich history in their comics of deep characterization, soap-opera drama and universal humor to draw on, Marvel has taken 40 plus years of experimentation and refined it into the most successful comic movies in history.

Humor, especially in comic book movies, must be handled a certain way or it becomes farce or camp. The MCU movies have found the right way and balance to allow their movies to be outright funny without being silly in the wrong ways. From the wisecracking arrogance of Tony Stark to the freewheeling space opera of *Guardians of the Galaxy* to the full embracing of wide range humor in *Ant-Man*, Marvel movies are moving comic movies past the bad memories of previous movies. Prior attempts that treated the comic material and humor as something that belonged at the low end of juvenile scale are finally being brought up to a more contemporary level, where "lowest common denominator" is being replaced by "appeals to all" and can be appreciated by kids and adults alike.

And that brings us back to the prevailing trend in most of the MCU movies. They aren't as much about putting on a colorful costume to go out and fight crime in the streets as they are about characters caught up in the craziness of their acquired super powers or technology and having to deal with them. There is a compulsion to the characters to do something constructive with them, to stop a bad guy, to save the world. This is a very humanizing and relatable element that helps us understand and root for the characters, for in the ideal world of our imaginations, it is what we see ourselves doing with such power. It is why we cheer them as heroes, and identify with them in their successes and failures. It is why we care.

Ant-Man brings Phase Two to a close, setting the stage for Phase 3 with no less than 11 new movies through 2019. There are additional plans for a Phase 4 to extend out to 2021. The success, quality and broad appeal of the Marvel Studios movies has created an anticipation and appetite for comic book movies never before seen, though always desired in the comic community. It is an amazing body of work so far, with no movie standing out as overtly bad or a stinker. Now the release of a comic book based movie, especially super hero ones, are met with intense interest and scrutiny. We will take a closer look at this new level of scrutiny and criticism - as well as delve into the speculation of the next several years of upcoming comic book movies - in the final installment of this series in the next issue.


The George Pérez Newsletter
#1
Winter '01
$5.00
50¢ from the sale of each issue will go to the American Diabetes Foundation and the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation of Canada
In This Issue...
✓ Articles!
✓ Artwork!
✓ Checklist!
✓ Biography!
✓ Trivia!
✓ An Exclusive Interview with George Pérez!

The George Pérez Newsletter #1

January 2001
Cover Price: $5.00
Publisher: Tony Lorenz
Editor, Production and Covers: Marcus Mebes

Contents
Front Cover: George Pérez

Introduction by Tony Lorenz

"*LSH to The History of The DCU*" by Davey Beauchamp (5 pages)
- Overview of George's Legion covers and History of the DC Universe.

"*How George Pérez Turned Me Into A Fan*" by Ilke Hincer (1 page)

"*Rarities: Troia from Who's Who and a page from Games*" (1 page)
- Artwork from Who's Who and the Games graphic novel.

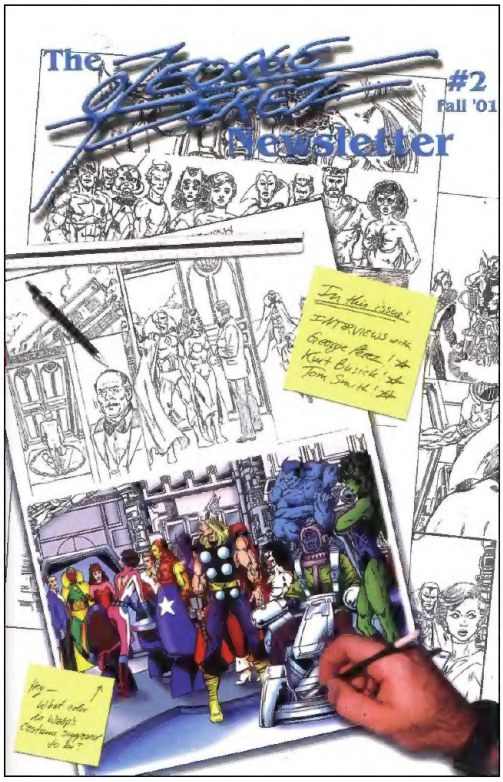
George Pérez Interviewed by Tony Lorenz (11 pages)

"*The George Pérez DC Comics Checklist*" (8 pages)

"*A Titan Amongst Titans*" by Brett A. Tolino (16 pages)
-A look at George's artwork on *New Teen Titans*.

"*George Pérez News*" (1 page)

"*George Pérez Art Gallery*" (4 pages)



The George Pérez Newsletter #2

November 2001
Cover Price: $6.50
Publisher: Tony Lorenz
Production Manager and Designer: Marcus Mebes

Contents
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Letter from Tony and Errata from Issue #1 by Tony Lorenz (1 page)

"The Fantastic George Pérez, The World's Greatest Comic Artist" by Tony Lorenz (3 pages)
- A look at George's work on *The Fantastic Four* comic.

"*Some Favorite Pérez covers*" (1 page)

"*Interview with George Pérez*" by Tony Lorenz (3 pages)

"*Kirk Philbrick's Homage to George Pérez" (8 pages)*

"*Feedback From Issue #1*" (2 pages)

"*George Pérez on The Net*" (2 pages)
- Links to some Pérez websites.

"*The George Pérez Marvel Comics Checklist*" (6 pages)

"Pérez Fans Around The World: *Lars P. Larsen of Denmark*" (3 pages) by Lars Peter Larsen
- A look at some Danish releases of some of George's comics.

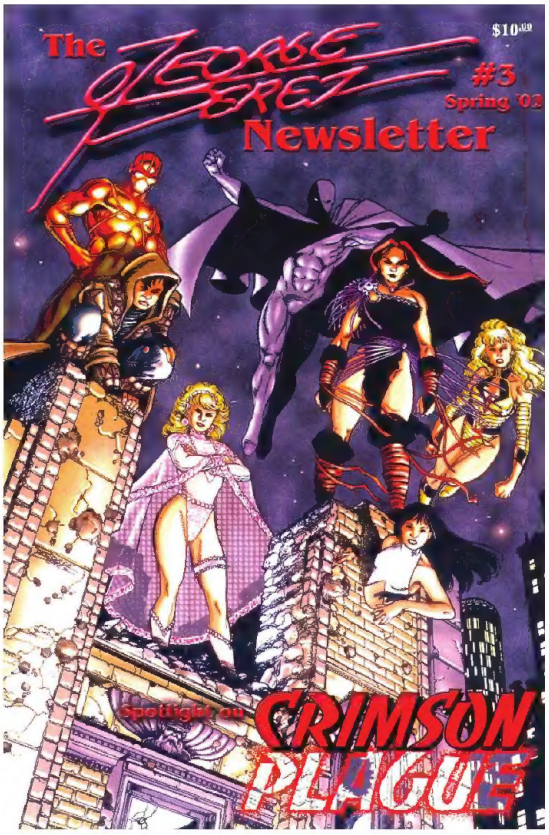
"*Kurt Busiek Interviewed*" by Tony Lorenz (3 pages)

"*News and Convention Schedule*" (2 pages)

"*Getting To Know Tom Smith*" by Tony Lorenz (2 pages)

"*Fan Art*" (12 pages)
- **Art:** Kirk Philbrick, Mitch Ballard, Bill Walko, Marcus Mebes, Tony Scott, Steven Miller

"*George Pérez Art Gallery*" (16 pages)



The George Pérez Newsletter #3

June 2002
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Publisher: Tony Lorenz
Production Manager: Marcus Mebes

Contents
Front and Back Covers: George Pérez

Letter from Tony by Tony Lorenz (1 page)

"The Burning Red" by Brian Cross (3 pages)
- A fanboy's account of *Crimson Plague.*

"*Crimson Plague Cast Members Speak Up!*" (6 pages)

"*News and Events*" (1 page)

"*Interview with George Pérez*" by Tony Lorenz (3 pages)

"*Rhymes With Cannon Power: An Interview With Shannon Lower*" by Tony Lorenz *(3 pages)*

"*DNA and I: An Interview With Dina Simmons"* by Tony Lorenz (*3 pages)*

"*Views in Crimson"* by Glenn Anderson (2 *pages)*

"*The Crimson Plague Checklist*" (4 pages)

"*Crimson Plague #3*" (16 pages)
- **Art:** George Pérez

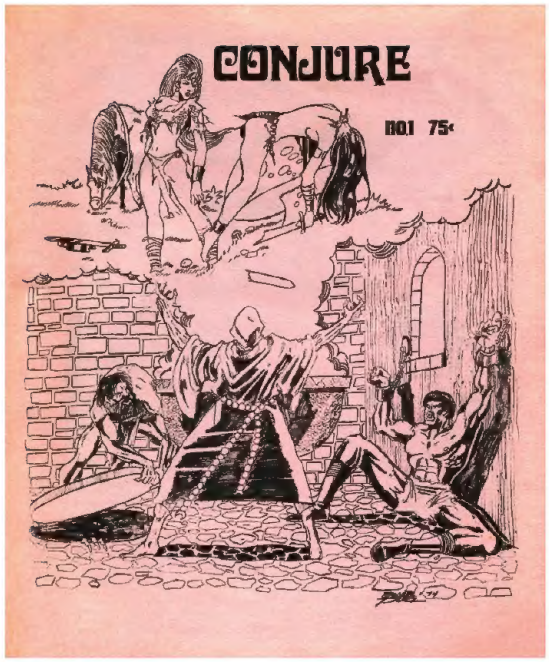
Art for the unpublished Crimson Plague #3

"*Crimson Plague Plot Breakdown*" (5 pages)
- Plot breakdown for what would have been issues #3-9.

"*Fan Art*" (18 pages)
- **Art:** Vu Nguyen, Glenn Anderson, Luciano Vecchio, Mitch Ballard, Steven Miller, Bill Neville, Shane Hai, Gene Gonzales, Fred Hembeck, Neil Vokes, James E. Lyle, Al Bigley, Richard Pollard, Amanda Conners, Georges Jeanty, Buzz, Tony Lorenz.

"*Gallery in Crimson*" (24 pages)
- **Art:** George Pérez

"Question of The Issue" (4 pages)
- Responses to the question "Who is your favorite Pérez inker?"



"Feedback on Issue #2" (2 pages)

"*George Pérez on The Net*" (1 pages)
- Links to some Pérez websites.

Conjure #1

1974
Cover Price: $.75
Publisher: Thomas Sciacca
Production Manager: Marcus Mebes

Contents
Front and Back Covers: George Pérez

"The Silent Narrative" (1 page)
- **Art:** Thomas Sciacca and George Pérez

Editorial.

"*The Legend of Kazo-Nal*" (5 pages)
- **Story and Art:** George Pérez
- **Letterer:** Yvette Olmeda Pérez
- **Editor:** Thomas Sciacca

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